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SIR

ASUTOSH MOOKERJEE
A STUDY



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I
TO MY
DEPARTED FATHER

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Our best thanks are due to the Hony. Secretary,
Calcutta Review for permitting us to use some of their
blocks in this book.—Publishers.



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SIR
ASUTOSH MOOKERJEE
A STUDY

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BY
PROBODH CHANDRA SINHA

With A Foreword By
PROF. C. V. RAMAN, D.S.C., F.R.S.
And An Introduction By
SIR P. C. RAY, KT., C.I.E., D.S.C., PH.D.

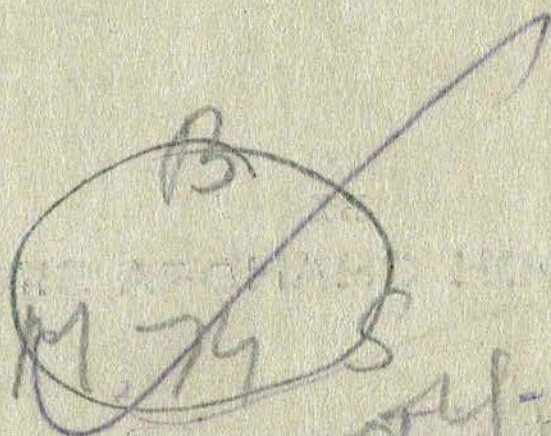


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PREFACE



The present work, as its title indicates, is really a study of the various aspects of the life and character of the great man who was universally regarded as the most powerful personality and the greatest reformer in the realm of higher studies and researches in the India of today. It is neither an ideal biography, nor has it any pretensions to completeness. But it aims at giving a glimpse of the great man in his many-sided interests and wide-ranging activities; it seeks to give an estimate of his complex character and his virile and versatile personality, to review his lifework and to interpret his life, indicating the part it played in our national life and in the forward march of our country to its higher and nobler destiny.

The work was originally begun four years ago; in the course of preparation and publication, it has passed through many vicissitudes, along with the author.

Messrs. R. Cambay & Co. had first taken up the task of publication; when it was nearing completion, by mutual consent, the task was transferred to the present publishers—Messrs. The Book Company Ltd.—to whom his thanks are due for the alacrity with which they brought it to a finish



PREFACE

in a short time ; he is also thankful to Mr. S. C. Kerr of Messrs. R. Cambray & Co. and Mr. N. C. Sen of Sakha Press for their courtesy and consideration.

It is the author's pleasant duty to acknowledge his deep indebtedness to the large circle of his friends and well-wishers, who have been good enough to extend their sympathy and help in this his first literary venture. From its very inception Mr. Panchanan Mittra, M. A., P. R. S. and his brother Mr. Pulin Krishna Mittra, M. A. have been an unfailing source of help and inspiration. Then at a critical period he received enthusiastic encouragement from no less a personage than Dr. C. V. Raman ; just before the book went to press, Dr. N. C. Ganguly, then Literary Secretary, National Council, Y. M. C. A. offered him enthusiastic support. Prof. Radhakrishnan, too, evinced the keenest interest in this work and gave him active help and advice, lately. He is also grateful to Sir Ewart Greaves and Sir P. C. Ray for their generous encouragement. He cannot, however, fail to mention his debt of gratitude to Rai Bahadur Dr. B. K. Roy, Civil Surgeon (Retd.), Purulia, who treated him and cheered him up in his protracted illness.

In conclusion, he must ask for the indulgence of his readers for the misprints and defects which he could not remedy in the present edition.



PREFACE

The author's task is now finished—at least, for the present. Most that comes rushing to his mind after four years of trials and tribulations, must now remain unsaid. He has striven and spared himself no pains, and the result?—the result he is content to leave in the lap of the gods.

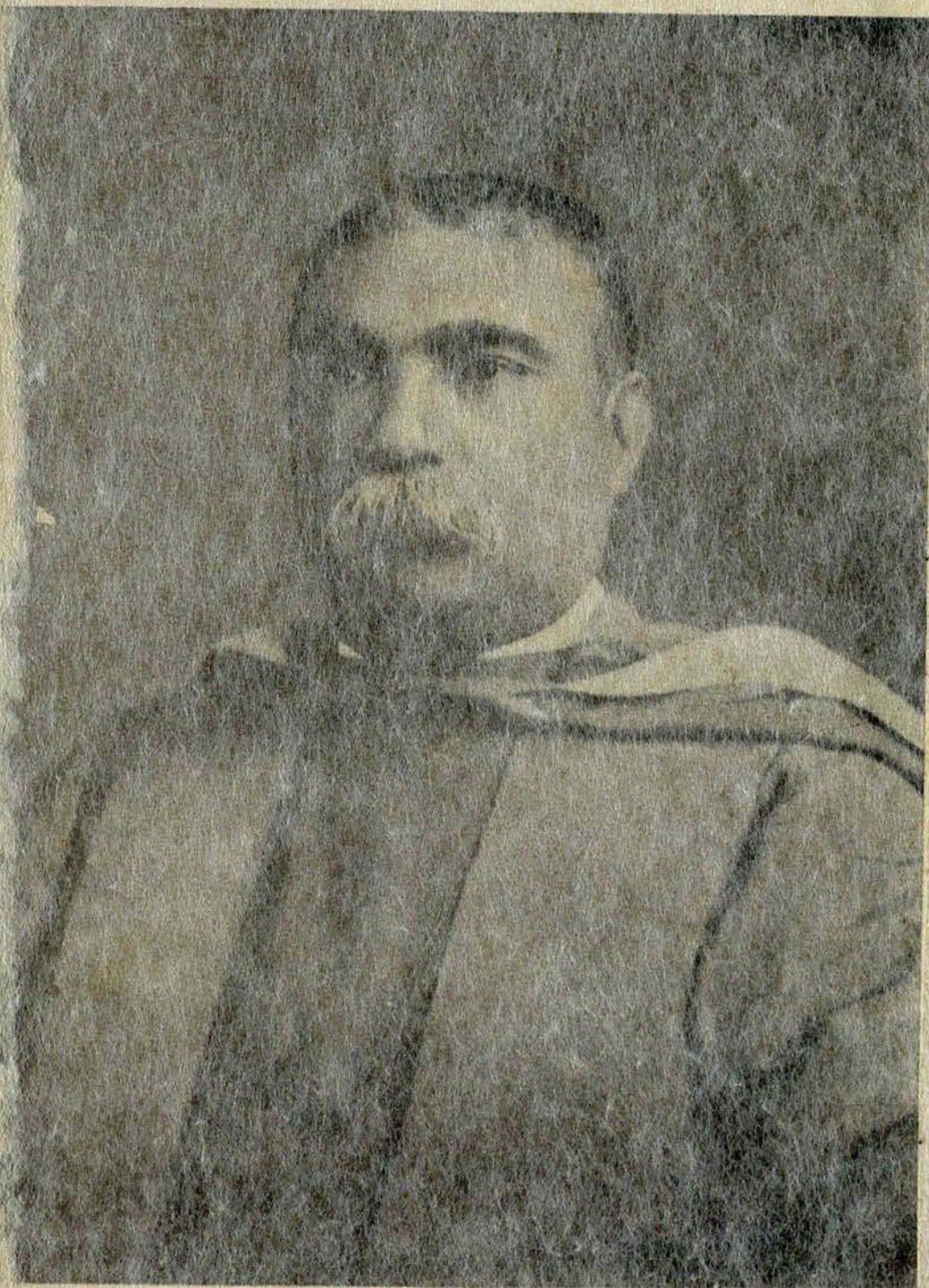
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Calcutta, 17th September, 1928.*

P. C. SINHA



8

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Charles Mackay



CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword By Dr. C. V. Raman, D. Sc., F.R.S.	XVI
Introduction By Sir P. C. Ray, Kt., C.I.E., D. Sc., Ph. D.	XVII

CHAPTER I

Introduction	...	...	1—19
--------------	-----	-----	------

CHAPTER II

Early Life

The ancestral home in Hooghly district— his father, Ganga Prosad—Asutosh's birth—his father's interest in him— The influence of illustrious men on his infant mind—his early ambitions—his mother—his eminent tutors—his admission into high school, its famous Head Master and Assistant Head Master—his varied reading and early fame, his proficiency in Mathematics —the boy becomes a Member of London Mathematical Association— his love of study	...	...	20—35
---	-----	-----	-------



CHAPTER III

Academic Career

Asutosh's admission into the Presidency College, its fame, its staff, its library and its students—Publication of his thesis in England—the range of his studies—his peculiar illness and recovery at Gajipur, his fresh illness—The result of I. A. Examination—Asutosh, a vegetarian—his early interest in University affairs—he takes the more difficult course in B. A.—his activities at the College—his achievements in B. A., M. A., P. R. S., M. A. (Science)—his interview with the Director of Public Instruction and refusal of service—Joins City College as a law student—Interview with Vice-Chancellor—At the auction sale of a library—Articled to Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh. ... 36—52

CHAPTER IV

Active Life and Sudden End

Asutosh becomes a Fellow—his election to the Syndicate in his 24th year—his memorable resolution for inclusion of Bengalee in the curriculum—his Doctorate—his appointment to the



Tagore Professorship—his election to the Bengal Council and nomination to the Calcutta Corporation, he is returned to the Imperial Council—he makes his presence felt in the Council and the Select Committee on the Universities Bill—his fight and attitude on it—his elevation to the Bench when he was 40, he becomes Vice-Chancellor—his subsequent reforms and labours in the University—his second Vice-Chancellorship—his many-sided interests and wide activities—The University Commission—he becomes Acting Chief Justice—he retires early and takes up the Dumraon Case at Patna—his dramatic end—the last fateful journey to the place of his birth—the unique homage and nation-wide grief

... .. 53—78

CHAPTER V

The Man—A Closer View

His filial affection—Remarriage of his widowed daughter, its significance—His devotion to his parents—his favourite delicacy, time-honoured way of keeping invitations—The simplicity of his dress at home and abroad—his eagerness to attend social functions

CONTENTS

—Enthusiasm for historic places—his accessibility and amiability, frankness and affableness—His open mind—The humane and emotional side of his nature; its warmth and sympathy—His keen interest in the affairs of his friends and acquaintances—his encouragement and inducement to promising scholars and scientists—his manly stand by a distant school against the wrath of the Government... 79—110

CHAPTER VI

The Intellectual Giant

The tendency of the age—Asutosh, a profound student and intellectual giant, his versatile scholarship, vast erudition and academic degrees—The student is not the man of action, Asutosh, Gladstone, Roosevelt among the exceptions to the general rule—No great original work commensurate with his intellectual powers—Tributes to his rare scholastic and intellectual eminence—his brilliance as a mathematician, his European fame—His greatest work, the paper on Monge's Differential Equation to all Conics—its recognition by pre-eminent scholars in Europe and India—His life-work ... 111—137



CHAPTER VII

The Brilliant Judge

His pre-eminent position in the premier High Court—his brilliant record—The importance and intrinsic worth of his judgments—Some of them referred to—his last memorable judgment, a historic one—his criticism of various parties—Refutation of the Stephen (J)'s interpretation of Sec. 34 of Indian Penal Code, his search for principles and precedents from far and near, his own authoritative interpretation and terse comments—his remarks on the trial—his clear interpretation and disapproval of the limited jurisdiction created by Clauses 25 and 26 of the Letters Patent—his reference to the British procedure of invoking clemency of the Crown—his reasons for dismissal—Striking tributes of the Bench and the Bar as well as of the Press on his retirement—Factors contributing to his singular success on the Bench—Estimate of Sir Sivaswamy Iyer...138—166

CHAPTER VIII

The Reformer in the Realm
of Education

The greatest reformer in the realm of Education and a creative force in the field



of 'advancement of learning'—Pre-University periods—The Despatch of 1854—The Act of Incorporation and the establishment of the University of Calcutta—Lords Ripon's and Curzon's Commissions—Indian Universities Act and the Regulations framed by Asutosh's Committee—Difference between the two Acts and change in the conceptions of the Ideal and functions of the University—conditions of development—Asutosh's task—Reforms in the schools and colleges—University Law College, University Professorships and Lecturers in the domain of Letters—University College of Science and Technology, Dr. Mohendra Lall Sircar and his Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, the princely gifts and endowments of Sir Tarak Nath Palit and Sir Rash Behari Ghosh, Government's indifference—University Readership Lectures by world-renowned savants and eminent scholars—Post-Graduate Consolidation Committee and the Councils of Teaching in Arts and Science—Further gifts by Sir Rash Behari, Kumar of Khairra, S. G. C. Ghosh and Asutosh—his second Vice-Chancellorship, financial crisis,—“Reform” controversy—more departments



opened—Sumtotal of his works and innovations, their criticisms and appreciations—his fidelity to the Ideal upheld by advanced thought—Farreaching effects of his achievements... ... 167—248

CHAPTER IX

The Powerful Public Man

His unique position in public life—his activities in the legislature and brief career in the old Imperial Legislative Council—he was a skillful parliamentarian but no typical politician, his shrewd suspicion of an 'unenlightened' democracy—his strong views on the place, the rights and functions of the University in the body politic—We uniformly upheld the grand democratic doctrine of Napoleon—his emphatic views on the question of students and politics—The conflict of his opinions, his policy and his actions with those of Mahatma Gandhi and Deshabandhu Das, the call of the leaders of the Non-co-operation Movement to boycott educational institutions in touch with the Government, the student's response and Asutosh's bold stand in Bengal—The two standpoints and policies, an estimate of their respective



consequences, their practical worth and
moral excellences... 249—272

CHAPTER X

The Statesman

A subject country is no training ground of statesman—The dearth of statesmen in India of today, due not to any inherent or constitutional defect, but to the political subjection—Among the solitary statesmen of India, Austosh shone prominently—his achievements and labours—his statesmanlike insight and wisdom, the breadth of his vision and the clearness of his perspective—The remarkable record that he left, worthy of any statesman of the world—the most important of his acts of statesmanship ... 273—287

CHAPTER XI

The Administrator

Administrative genius in a great jurist—Judge and scholar, a rare spectacle in life—Asutosh, the great administrator and the miraculous man of action in the University—his unusual burden and tremendous responsibilities of his office in the abnormally critical periods in the annals of the University and of the



country—the singular success of his tenure—Factors contributing to the difficulties of the office, nature of his duties and his tasks—his works enumerated—An estimate of his genius and his achievements as an administrator. ... 288—301

CHAPTER XII

The Speaker

Asutosh, one of the foremost speakers of his generation, but not a born orator—his great debating qualities and dialectical skill—Two of his typical speeches—his last Convocation Address at the Calcutta University, was memorable and historic—The speeches reveal the intellectual supremacy and inner calibre of the man—the nature of his eloquence—Asutosh, compared with some of the master orators of modern Bengal ... 302—309

CHAPTER XIII

The Friend of Learning

Asutosh, the greatest friend of the scholars and the students—his love of learning knew no 'scientific frontier' nor his encouragement of scholarship and talent any artificial barriers—he not only nationalized but internationalized his



CONTENTS.

University—his discouragement of 'the principle of nationality' and his catholicism and universalism in higher study and research—he upheld the grand democratic doctrine of Napoleon—his exertions for the scholars and students. ... 310—315

CHAPTER XIV

The Leader

Asutosh, a born leader, in the higher sense of the term—A reformer is always a leader—his abiding qualities as a leader, the peculiarity of his environment and of the field of his leadership—a ruler of his fellow men, he was no mass-leader like Lokamannya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi—Instances of his superior leadership—he was a thought-leader of his people and a guide to future generations. ... 316—327

CHAPTER XV

The Patriot

Patriotism was the breath of his nostril—A subject country has little scope for patriots—Government service is the grave of patriotism, Asutosh an exception to the general rule.—The nature of his patriotism,—not politics, but his



University claimed his energies—The negative aspect of his patriotism, he was a Bengali of Bengalis and an Indian of Indians—The positive side of his patriotism, his unique sacrifice on the altar of his University, 'the handmaid of our common motherland'—The call of his country swept the thinker and the scholar and the intellectual giant—His grand sacrifice and patriotic labours. ... 328–343

CHAPTER XVI

The Idealist

Asutosh, the seer, the prophet and the mystic—Thanks to the tendency of the age and march of civilization the idealist is pushed to the background—The atmosphere of a subject country like India is not conducive to the rise of the idealist—The need of a lofty idealism but fewer idealists today—The Ideal of a greater India, dreamt by her glorious sons left severely alone—Asutosh compared with some of our greatest idealists—An exposition of his Ideal and of his lofty idealism in the reformation and renovation of his University, his faith in the future of Bengalee Literature—The value of



his Ideal—thanks to his brilliant career and versatile personality, the great idealist did not receive his due in his lifetime but future generations will acclaim him and appreciate his idealism. ... 344—361

CHAPTER XVII

The Representative Man

The great men like Asutosh constitute a class by themselves—The secret of their advent and popular misconception—Emerson throws a flood of light on it—‘The river of thoughts and events’ and ‘the ideas and necessities that forced’ Asutosh onward—The great Renaissance movement in India and in the East—Ram Mohun Roy, the maker of modern India, his lifework—The impact of the West and its effects upon India—The great awakening, the clash of ideals old and new and progress of new ideas—The rage of westernization and the need for a ‘Return Movement’—Asutosh, at once a foremost product and champion of this revivalism—Keshav Chandra Sen’s fame in Europe and Vivekananda’s achievements in America and their salutary effect upon the great Movement in India—Its



religious, literary, cultural and social aspects—Ishwar Chandra also paved the way for Asutosh's advent and work—The Bengalee literary genius and its singular output—The political turmoil, the tense atmosphere and the virulent agitation (in the eighties)—Three pre-eminent Indians and their labours—Real nation-wide progress yet to come—Its first requisite—The educational advancement, educational reformer and worker—Asutosh's advent, another necessity—His simple strenuous patriotic life, an antidote to growing denationalisation and lethargy. ... 362—403

CHAPTER XVIII

Character and Personality

Asutosh an impressive figure, outwardly—'the most powerful public character'—the complexity of his character—his greatness unlike Lokamannya Tilak's, Deshabandhu Das's, Mahatma Gandhi's or the great Rabindra Nath's—The unique synthesis in his character, its limitations and advantages—Asutosh and Tilak—his personality, like Disraeli's—its striking qualities—The Bengal Tiger and the British Bulldog—A rare and remarkable combination in his personality;



his intellectual ascendancy, his imagination and practical sense, his all-embracing emotioalism and intense spiritualism—his ambition, his love of power and pomp—his eagerness for effect—his spirit of independence—The secret of his success and of his popularity—The misunderstanding of, and paradox in, the great men, Chittaranjan and Asutosh, an explanation of popular misunderstanding—Asutosh, compared and contrasted with some pre-eminent personalities—Striking references by different eminent scholars and leaders to different traits in his character, different men stressed different characteristics ... 404—453

CHAPTER XIX

His Life-Work and Message

Asutosh was not responsible for the Act of 1904 or for the absence of ideal results and method—The overcrowding of the legal profession, its disastrous consequences—Asutosh's life-long association with Governmental institutions and, his aloofness from the Freedom Movement in the sphere of politics, unlike Deshabandu Das and Pandit Malaviya—parasitic tendency of big organizations, the rise of the Calcutta University eclipsed



CONTENTS.

the life and prevented the growth of other institutions, the country's loss on that account—his disassociation with the National Congress, but 'his heart was in unision with his time and country'—his contribution to the great forward movement in various ways—he tried to save India's eternal soul and rouse her creative spirit—he demonstrated India's capacity to add to the common heritage of humanity, and stimulated her genius for mastery, of European Science and Thought—Asutosh, a world-personality, his visualization of the path of human progress and his contribution to the international understanding and harmony—The verdict of posterity, a maker of modern India, a hero of action, a representative man and a great builder.—Asutosh's Message ... 454—186

APPENDIX

Democratic control in the University—Asutosh's Lucknow Speech. ...	489—505
Ideals of Vice-Chancellorship—Correspondence between Lord Lytton and Asutosh ...	506—518
Index ...	519
Errata ...	531



FOREWORD

Few will question that a biography of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee is well worth writing. The extraordinary abilities and personality of the man commanded admiration and respect from all, and a record of his life and achievements cannot fail to prove an inspiration to his countrymen, young and old, both now and in future generations. Combining in himself the intellectual outlook of a great scholar with the Napoleonic vigour of a man of action, Sir Asutosh had few equals in his life-time, either in India or outside it. In attempting, for the first time, to collect the available materials concerning the life of Sir Asutosh and presenting them in a readable form, Mr. Sinha has rendered a distinct public service. It must have required no little courage for one not previously known as an author and possessing no resources or influence, to venture upon such a task. I plead for a favourable and indulgent consideration of his efforts and commend them to the notice of the public.

210, Bowbazar Street, Calcutta,

The 10th September, 1928.

C. V. RAMAN



INTRODUCTION

BY

Sir P. C. Ray

The sixties of the last century drew into Bengal some of the mightiest souls who were destined to leave their mark in almost every field of international culture. Vivekananda who carried the banner of Hinduism in the Chicago Parliament of Religion, Rabindra Nath Tagore who won the Nobel prize from Sweden, J. C. Bose who founded the Temple of Science in the India of today, were all born within a few years in the early part of the decade; it was this decade which ushered in as well the mightiest academic organizer and builder in the domain of higher studies and researches and closed with the birth of that champion of national emancipation and freedom, that unfailing friend of suffering humanity—Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das. It seemed as if the mighty spirit of Civa was astir in all the fields of thought and knowledge and was everywhere breaking down barriers for sowing the seeds of new creations. In a recent remarkable brochure 'The Dance of Civa' ('Today and Tomorrow' series) Collum points out to some of these heroic figures, "as a conveniently identifiable point from which to date the dawn of new thought, just as today we put our finger on Socrates when we wish to



focuss our view of the beginning of that newth thought which inspired the West for centuries."

Is it a mere coincidence that all these pioneering souls were stirred by the same spirit; of each of whom could be said, as has been said by the author, of Sir Asutosh: 'He worked for the 'Return Movement' in India; he laboured to bring about a wide-ranging Indian Renaissance, an intellectual regeneration through a nation-wide progress of education. ...he made it the mission of his life to blot out the stigma of India's cultural inferiority, to explode the fiction of her intellectual defeat and raise her once more to her lofty pedestal of glory.'" But it would be a gross misreading, a superficial estimate, a skin-deep interpretation, if only the forces of reaction are seen moving in any of these. Too deep and original, each was pulsated by a keen national instinct to create a new age, to bring forth a new life in the old *corpus* of India's national heritage. The Hindu spirit of conserving the old forms as much as possible and yet transforming them out of all recognition by new leaven was always there.

It is too early in the day to judge of Sir Asutosh's achievement by the stability of the measures carried out by him; but it is quite clear that his life and activities were, as has been nicely put by the author, of a piece with those of other great nation-builders of India who are the direct products of the movements destined to herald a higher,



holier, deeper humanity to come. It is in this sense that each of the mighty personalities of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in a land with scarcely a political being of her own, has a world importance. It is quite true that their comparative worth would be appraised more or less by the depth and intensity of their inner ideas, by their breadth and universality of culture, as also by their success in the field of action; it is in the last category that Sir Asutosh would figure along with many a national hero.

A mere slavish imitation of the dazzling glories of the resplendent West would not have entitled him to the gratitude of posterity. Had not the things he fought for somewhere, somehow—deeper roots within the very heart of the nation, had they not been quick with the pulsations of a new life of the nation, nay of the new world-age slowly but surely coming into being, even a fraction of his success could not have been achieved by him and his words and actions could not have become the mottoes and models of his contemporaries.

Alas! when India herself is still but an object of ridicule and pity, it is hardly the time to judge her great men; but when the faint glimmering dawn of today bursts forth in the glory of her midday sun and the ideas for which our national heroes worked receive their fruition, contemporary records will be eagerly canvassed by the historian of our period.



Posterity will judge Sir Asutosh, and rightly too, as the greatest reformer, 'a creative force,' in the realm of education and research—as the author has eloquently said. Indeed, the vital problem of a nation—particularly of a nation, in the firm grip of a foreign power and weighed down with many age-old customs and usages, yet destined and determined to come into her own in the world of nations—its problem is mainly in the field of education. Its educational methods indicate its sincerity and fitness in the preparation for the achievement of that goal. When the Indian ideal of life as the seer K. C. Satyasrayi points out, is accepted to be the building-up of a perfect body for a perfect mind and the perfect mind for the highest spirituality, it will be recognised that we need scientific, vocational and economic education ; secondly, culture of the highest thoughts; and thirdly, spiritual meditation. India, when she finds her own, would not stop short of any ideal which does away with this tripartite system of education—material, mental and spiritual. Perhaps to Sir Asutosh was not given the task of creating a new world of his own and to forge a new system which would be at once the admiration and despair of the world ; but to him was surely given to work out the miracle of naturalizing a plant of temperate zone in a tropical region on which it was languishing so long under artificial conditions ; so that it could burst forth in the open



air with the grandeur of tropical foliage. Here again, as the biographer has very rightly pointed out, what Dr. Rajendra Lall Mitra tried to do by refusing to sail abroad, yet beating the best Western savants in their own fields by personal achievements, what the Science Association of Dr. Mohendra Lall Sircar and Bengal National Council of Education were trying to give shape to with indifferent results,—thanks to the non-co-operation of the Government with the people—Sir Asutosh brought about with great success.

Nationalism and internationalism in culture are problems of the deepest moment today. Sir Asutosh tried to sink his fountains of education deep into the wells of national traditions with the help of a foreign machinery and at the same time took care that the fountain provided the most delicious beverage to all nations. He tried to rise above parochial patriotism which is eating into the very vitals of the body politic and his curricula in Vernaculars and History would show how much anxious he was to bring about a synthesis between Bengal and the other Provinces of India; all these indicate his healthy enlightened and intense nationalism.

Asutosh would be recognised as one of the greatest of Indians—one who tried to build up a nation, to force her pace and to bring her up to the level of the advancing nations of the West, by rousing her sense of past glory as much as by trying



to evoke national self-respect and quicken national self-consciousness and self-confidence by her present achievements. Indeed he fondly dreamt of making Calcutta a centre of Indian culture before the transfer of Capital gave a rude shock to his cherished desires ; but he did not try to create a new centre like Benares or Aligarh around the aspirations of newly growing communal currents.

Veteran fighters and workers, redoubtable leaders and patriots—men who had grown grey in the service of their country, men who had been in the thick of the fight—all looked to him to guide and lead the nation on to victory in the wider fields as he had done in the academic sphere. For it was recognised that he had the unbounded self-confidence and unique moral and intellectual equipments and resourcefulness to work out the salvation and uplift of his country with the conditions imposed by history; and it was nothing short of a grim national calamity that he was taken away from us too early to begin and to bring this work to fruition.

*University College of Science,
92, Upper Circular Road,
Calcutta*

Dated 7th August, 1928

P. C. RAY



29th June 1864 -

Sir Asutosh Mookerjee—A Study.

CHAPTER I.

Introduction.

"Men are always rare in all countries through whom the aspiration of their people can hope to find its fulfilment, who have the thundering voice to say that what is needed shall be done ; and Ashutosh had that magic voice of assurance. He had the courage to dream because he had the power to fight and the confidence to win—his will itself was the path to the goal... My admiration was attracted to him where he revealed the freedom of mind needed for work of creation..... It had been possible for him to dream of the miracle of introducing a living heart behind the steel framework made in the doll factory of bureaucracy... The creative spirit of life which has to assert itself against barren callousness must, in its struggle for victory, wreck things that claim only immediate value. We can afford to overlook such losses which are pitifully small compared to the great price of our object, which is freedom. Ashutosh heroically fought against heavy odds for winning freedom for our education."

RABINDRA NATH TAGORE.



Advents of truly great men—men who 'correct the delirium of animal spirits, make us considerate, and engage us to new aims and powers',—men from whom 'our life receives some promise of explanation'—are like the angels' visit, few and far between; sometimes, there come in our midst men, who, rising into eminence, become the most prominent figures in the social or public life of their country; some, again, make the greatest noise and sensation, attract a good deal of attention or even admiration, by prosperity and popularity attained in some sphere of life or by greatness thrust upon themselves; after their death, they are mere names—at best, a tradition, for sometime to come; but the great men, the representative men of their times, the leaders of thought and heroes of action—men who are the highest products of our civilization and culture, are not buried into oblivion so easily—the lustre of their lives lives long after they are dead and gone; for, they live, after their death, in their lifework, in the changes wrought, in the spirit fostered, in the ideas championed and in the ideal bequeathed to the succeeding generations. But the questions arise: who are really the blessed souls that constitute this type of great men? what is the *sine qua non* of this kind of greatness? what is the true standard by which to judge and assess it? How to understand and appreciate the great, as also to distinguish them from a host of others who may have all the lime light of popularity and prominence, nay who



may even claim some pre-eminence, but who can no boast of much of the abiding, intrinsic qualities and paramount factors constituting greatness? And it is only with a sympathetic understanding, a sense of fairness and dignity, and with a worshipful spirit that we can hope to do justice to the great and avoid falling into pitfalls of the barren controversy and conflicts of opinions that centre round these tions; the key to the secret of their greatness and the mystery of their advent does not belong to lesser critic but to the ardent student.

Greatness admits of no clear-cut, easy and precise definition; nor is it any rare quality of head and heart; rather it is a cluster of attributes, a preponderance of a quality or qualities that mark a man out from among his contemporaries and enable him to change, to influence or mould—in whatever great or small degree—his time and his environment, and leave the marks of his genius or the example of his noble soul behind—the heritage of his posterity. He, indeed, is the great man, who, by dint of his intrinsic worth and achievement and work in some walks of life or other, towers head and shoulder over the common run of men, one who lives altogether on a higher plane, as it were, adding the lustre of his life on the people below. 'I count a great man' says Emerson, 'who inhabits a higher sphere of thought, into which other men rise with labour and difficulty; he has to open his eyes to see things in true light and larger relations. He is



great who is what he is from nature'. Judged by this supreme standard, the greatness of Asutosh is clear enough; nothing can describe his greatness or establish his title to be ranked among the great representative men of their times, so easily and briefly as these few words—he inhabited 'a higher sphere of thought' and could 'do his best thing easiest and was what he was from nature'. Any one who has followed his remarkable career, or has come into contact with him, any one who will study his life seriously or will have a casual reading, will not surely fail to be impressed with the central fact which emerges beyond the shadow of the faintest doubt—the fact, namely, that here is at last a man who lives, moves and has his being in a different region; here indeed, is an individual who occupies an enormous space in the public life of the country, who, by his prodigious and prolonged activities in more than one important field of work has literally made history, linking his own lifestory with the story of the national progress and national prosperity, who, moreover, seemed to belong not to this old, familiar, matter-of-fact world of ours, but to a loftier realm, overflowing with faith and hope, glory and vitality,—a world which seemed to be the ultimate source of his greatest urge and highest inspiration and unfailing idealism! He had something of the extraordinary in all he did and spoke and thought; all his speeches and addresses, all his labours and



INTRODUCTION.

thoughts—not to speak of his ideals and faith—bore the impress of his genius and the stamp of his versatile personality; none the less, were they, the ordinary outturns and expressions of his nature, springing from it with the easy, simple and spontaneous flow of a rivulet. And the presiding angel of his life endowed him with a prophetic vision and piercing ken with which he saw things in their true colour and larger relations.

Throughout his career, this angelic vision, this truer, inner light never failed him, and there was always a glow of idealism, a breadth of outlook, a firm grip of the actualities as well as of the potentialities and a rare faith in the ultimate triumph of truth and of his cause; the momentous question of principles and policies that he dealt with, or the many intricate and complex problems that he tackled, the enormous, difficult and multifarious works that he brought himself to perform, the uphill tasks that he applied himself to, lastly the epochmaking achievements that he could point to as his contributions to the national awakening and uplift and to the progress of human thought and knowledge, would have crushed any other individual of his generation by their sheer weight and variety, no less by their difficulty and complexity. But then, he was 'strong as Nature is strong, who lifts the land into the mountain slopes without effort, and by the same rule, as she floats a bubble in the air.'



But however great a man may be in the possession of intrinsic worth or genius, whatever prominence he may acquire and pre-eminence he may attain, he will surely not reach the zenith of human greatness, unless and until he 'abolishes himself' and his spirit 'diffuses itself'; unless and until he gives his very best to, and loses himself in the service of, his fellow creatures. The goddess of our life is a jealous deity and will not suffer any one to retain his greatness or his fame but will consign him to the dustbin of oblivion or obscurity, contempt or apathy, either in his lifetime or after his death—no matter however high his place in our midst—if he does not thoroughly identify himself with the fortunes of his fellowmen, if he does not champion their cause; the fact is, an individual is so indissolubly linked with human society,—with his country, particularly,—that he can not isolate himself thoroughly,; unfortunately—specially in our country, in these days—it happens, more often than not, that an individual, as soon as he is able to rise to some eminence, manages to forget the larger relations in which he stands to the society and the country; but the violation of this fundamental law of human society and civilization, brings its own punishment; he is often disillusioned; his fall, in some shape or other, is sure to come in life or after death. But the truly great never lose sight of the organic, intimate and innate relation of the individual to the society, and will not, as if by instinct, live their



INTRODUCTION.

lives in glorious isolation and solitary independence in the midst of society. And Asutosh, who was one of 'nature's darlings' and in whom had taken place, in a striking degree, a harmonious development of man's bright side, his brilliant parts and his higher nature, gave the very best of his Godgiven gifts and devoted most of his un-common capacities and exuberant energies, not to the furtherance of his narrow self-interests, but to the promotion of the larger interests and the greater cause of his fellow creatures; he worked, day and night, he strove hard, he fought tooth and nail, he did all these and more for the fulfilment of the larger, better and higher life of his people,—the life of which he had had such a sure and fascinating vision,; it was the mission of his life to hasten it, to herald it; it was, as he once said in a pathetic strain, his day-dream, for the realization of which he lived his life and staked his all.—and he rejoiced to do it.

There is seldom any uniformity in human greatness. The great are great in various ways and can hardly be judged by a hard and fast standard. They vary according to the tradition, culture, history and influences of their respective race, their society and their times; there are great men the simplicity of whose life and lifeworks is apparent and they are, thus, easy to understand and easy to appreciate; there are those, again who, by the complexity of their characters, and by the farreaching and, for the time being, controversial nature of their



works and achievements, offer a difficult problem to the student of contemporary biographies; such a man was Asutosh Mookerjee. His was a complex character—his mode of living was simple to a degree; he had a personality, at once, magnetic, dynamic and commanding, at times elusive, destined not only to make itself felt and to cut its own way in the world, but also like Disraeli's to bend to its course, by its irresistible force and vigour, every thing and every body—public opinion and institutions, high officials of the state and prominent public men—a personality, destined, in short, to lead, to rule, to lord it over, as it were. The very field of his activities and the nature of his principal work would not have acquired too much exertion of his giant's strength and energy, in the ordinary favourable circumstances—under a national Government and in these days of democracy and enlightenment; and his genius would have found other and more suitable channels of expression and more scope and field; perhaps the fund of his extraordinary working capacity would not have been so exhausted in such a manner—perhaps his health and his constitution would not have been undermined so fatally as to make for so sudden, so sad a collapse, in the normal course of 'advancement of learning' in various stages; and he might have been spared to his country men for some time to come when, of all things, his services, his experience, his moral and intellectual powers, his statesmanship, above all his enlightened



INTRODUCTION.

patriotism and his sage counsel, were in urgent requisition. But who can overrule the decrees of fate? who could foretell a little before his death at Patna that this intellectual giant, this hero of work, this ruler of men and leader of thought—this prince among men would breathe his last in such tragic circumstances?

It was the the proud boast of Disraeli that he had to 'educate' his party; really it was not without a subtle process of 'education' that he could have wrung out of his party the second great Reform Act of the last century. But the task of Asutosh was not merely to 'educate' his party, to harness public opinion—Indian public opinion in particular—to his side, but also to 'educate' his superiors, to prevail upon his masters, the earthly arbiters of his country's fate, who were, by no means, always over-sympathetic to him, his policy or his line of action. Unlike Disraeli, who, once installed in the leadership of his party, came to the helm of affairs of his country and became one of the few dictators of Europe in the normal course of events, Asutosh had to face and overcome one stumbling block after another and put up a stubborn fight for his ideal, for the independence and integrity of his University, to the end of the chapter; and out of the protracted struggle and controversy, that he had had to carry on times, without number, between the forces of progress represented by him and in his personality on the one hand and the



forces of reaction and retrogradation represented by a powerful autocracy and a strong bureaucracy, between an individual representative of the people and the alien Government of the land Asutosh invariably came, with flying colours. In the violent contact with the powerful authorities, in his strenuous and continuous struggle to realize his lofty ideal of the greatest temple of learning and research in Asia, reviving the glories of Nalanda and providing for the development of the studies of letters and sciences in their highest stages, no less for the widespread diffusion of a liberal, popular, secondary and University, education among all sections of his countrymen in ever-increasing numbers—in this lifelong struggle, his herculean strength and energy, his indomitable will and perseverance, his marvellous powers of organization and construction, of expression and of persuasion, in brief, his towering personality and his sterling character, were seen, and shone, to the best advantage.

He was one of those few characters that reflect the better mind of his people, champion the loftier ideals of the age, and sum up in themselves, the higher trends and tendencies of his race, struggling for expression and outlets; his was one of those lives that change and shape the course of events and things, and inaugurate a new era in the history of their country. No doubt he had less of the 'Himalayan height' or of the 'Pacific depth' that characterise these heroes, but the range of his



INTRODUCTION.

powers, the massiveness of his intellects and the versatility of his personality went a long way to make up for this deficiency; and the fields of his activities and thoughts as also of his knowledge and scholarship were enormous and varied. Like some glorious phenomena of Nature, which command our awe and wonder but paralyze our attempt at definition, his personality defies, and suffers from, analysis. His was the life that impressed upon his fellow creatures the magnitude and extent of its greatness and shines today in its own grandeur, now that he is dead and gone. He was one of those rare figures on the world's stage, those dominant and baffling characters—who, not exactly, 'like the poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and is heard no more', but more resembling the burning sun,—come and dazzle our globe with their innate brilliance, infuse new life and lustre into the men and things around, and drop off, leaving a deep and dismal void behind.

Men have tried to codify, capture and even dogmatize about truth and even to compress it in the narrow groove of a sentence or a few words; these, the world accepts as its mottoes investing them with the sanctity and authority of guiding principles of life. But the great truth revealed in human life—the truth that manifests itself in the lives of the great men—can not be crystallized into, or judged by, so many sayings and mottoes based on halftruths and malobservation. The lives of great



men abound with paradoxes and perplexities—so many deviations and departures from average, humdrum, matter—of fact—lives and would have been the less striking and appealing, but for these. Nor are we to expect all the monopoly of goodness or greatness, wisdom or morality, fidelity to some fixed principles or constancy of conduct, from our heroes and our great men. 'No man' says Emerson, 'in all procession of famous men is reason or illumination or that essence we are looking for, but is an exhibition, in some quarter, of new possibilities'.

The lives of the great men all the world over illustrate and establish the important fact that greatness in humanity does not presuppose perfection or absolute right or merely abstract morality, rather the many frailties and faults, defects and shortcomings that flesh is heir to, the great are not altogether free from. And no one will claim for Asutosh a greater or more absolute immunity from these common failings and foibles than others or greater masters and heroes of ancient and modern times. But we of the present generation are all too full of the glare of his life, too much dazzled by the brilliance of his career, too profoundly impressed by his personality and too much affected by his life-work to have a clear perspective and a dispassionate view of his failings; we may profitably leave the task to the next generations.

Nevertheless, the life of Asutosh was remarkable and it is greatly interesting and instructive



for its many paradoxes and its rare peculiarities ; it was the living refutation of many accepted notions and ideas applicable to ordinary men. Man is said to be the creature of circumstances ; no doubt he is so, to a certain extent ; but it was the chief glory of Asutosh's life that with a resolution made at the dawn of his manhood, he broke down, one after another, the iron barriers of circumstances till he had the satisfaction of finding—as far as possible under human limitations—his cherished dreams of boyhood and youth, as accomplished facts. Under the benevolent despotism of Britain—until very lately—the Indians are having every thing done for them by their British rulers ; they have had no say, not to speak of any initiative, in a great national policy or programme ; nor are the means to carry this out, within their easy reach ; but Asutosh rose superior to his environment and soared above his predecessors ; he launched upon a big and far-reaching policy, and translated into action, his great scheme of national advancement in the domains of popular, secondary, higher, education and culture, as also in the realms of highest researches and original thinking. As the late Mr. Gokhale said from his place in the Indian Legislative Council—and it is almost a truism—that the Bengalis are the most emotional people of India ; but the reverse proposition is too readily supposed to be necessarily true ; and it is generally taken for granted that any sustained work and protracted activity



must be conspicuous by their absence among them ; that they are a race of lawyers, speakers and clerks ; but the lives of Asutosh, of Sir R. N. Mukherjee, S. J. Buttokristo Paul, Sir J. C. Bose, Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, Dr. P. C. Roy and of many other eminent men as well as the pioneer workers in the sphere of social reform, educational expansion and industrial activities independent of the Government of the country, give the lie direct to the common belief and are proof positive of the active, constructive and organizing faculties of the Bengalis. Born in a subject country, weighed down under a foreign yoke, fettered hand and foot and bred in a society which revels in a morbid conservatism and blind orthodoxy, Asutosh was the freest man under the sun ; freedom was the breath of his nostril, the bedrock of his whole being, his watchword and a guiding, controlling, overmastering principle of his life ; a member of a subject race of dwarfed stature and stunted growth, the child of a society which groans under the load of a hundred old customs and superstitions and is more dead than alive, he was the mightiest monarch of all he surveyed ; there was something regal in his manners and modes and moods ; he thought like a king, spoke like a king and had had his own ways like a king, in fine, he attained his herculean strength and his giant's stature, he stepped into his place in public life, as of right, in the circumstances the degrading forces of which were sure to suppress and dwarf all



other than exceptionally great and gifted. Bengal, for the matter of that, India has produced many great men in the present stage of her reniassance; many are the geniuses and prodigies, sublime characters and lofty idealists, thinkers and men of action, who have shed a lustre on the land of their birth; but few are those who like Asutosh, have worked in the service of their motherland and of the humanity—worked incessantly, indefatigably and fearlessly—setting forth before themselves and thier countrymen, the highest ideal and striving steadfastly and tenaciously to attain it; few are those, who, like him, are born with a mission, as it were, and have made it the be-all and end-all of their lives to reform, to transform, to change and mould, in the light of a newer, broader and higher ideal, some social, educational or political, systems or institutions; fewer are those who like him, are endowed by nature with such singular and varied intellectual powers, force of character and spirit of independence which help them in becoming pioneers and original thinkers, leaders of men and of thought; very few are those who, like him, chalk out boldly a path for their people to tread on and are fortunate enough to lead them on within sight of the promised land; fewer are those who have moreover, the privilege of constructing and leaving behind themselves, some growing, thriving and living monuments of their lives, just as Asutosh, by his undying faith and idealism, his sheer ability



and untiring efforts, has built a beautiful and glorious temple, essential to the national growth and greatness and pulsating with a new energy, instinct with a new life and aglow with a new light—a temple for the hundreds and thousands of his countrymen to be sanctified and bathed in, in the sunshine of knowledge and culture.

If this ancient land of ours with a glorious past and a hoary civilization and culture, if it is so long under the sway of a foreign power, if it is so helpless and unable to raise its head in the comity of nations, it is not because there has been suddenly a dearth of intellect amongst us, but because there has been a dearth of men, manly, patriotic and broadminded, men of the type of Asutosh who could stand erect, speak out and act up to, Truth, face and love Truth, and live and die for Truth ; if our society which was once a nursery of liberalism and fraternity, if it is today in a stagnant and lifeless state, it is due not mainly to a lack of lofty ideas and pious wish, but to a want of lofty and steadfast, characters, like Asutosh. If the essential condition of national life and national progress and pre-eminence is to add to the fund of human knowledge and contribute to the forward march of human thought, it has been the unique privilege of Asutosh to have heralded the dawn of this national greatness in the not very distant horizon by building for the first time in modern India, the very highest departments of studies and



researches from which is pouring forth and will pour forth, India's quota to the sumtotal of human knowledge and to the progress of his advancing thought. If it is the mission of India—as it is the dream of her poets and patriots and the hope of many advanced spirits in Europe and in America—to deliver to a worn-out, war-weary and exhausted world, the healing balm of her culture, the soothing message of her spirituality and the abiding secret of her eternal life on earth, it will ever rebound to his enduring glory that Asutosh paved the way for this consummation by introducing and encouraging studies and researches in Anthropology, and in the history, culture and civilization of ancient India, by making his Alma mater, a sanctuary of world's scholarship and a confluence of world's culture, which is welcoming within its doors, many savants and scholars, doctors and philosophers from different renowned centres of learning all over the world, and thus, by bringing about once more in the twentieth century, a cultural and intellectual communion of India with the cultural and intellectual world abroad! And this communion will herald the dawn of a new era in her history—it will hasten the day of her resurrection—the day of her spiritual leadership.

Apart from this crowning achievement—this accomplishment of his God-given mission which will at once hand down his name to, and will be the proud heritage of, the generations yet unborn,



Asutosh's interests and activities, knowledge and pre-eminence spread in so many directions, his abilities and intellect shone in such multifarious and often diverse subjects that eminence in any one of them would have raised a man from common mediocrity. It may be reasonably asserted—after making due allowance for the fundamentally different circumstances—that Asutosh belonged to that wonderful and extremely rare class of great men of which Julius Caesar in the ancient, Michael Angelo in the mediaeval and Napoleon, in the modern world and our Ram Mohan Roy were the most brilliant representatives. And he has left many marks of his Roman hand in the foundation and superstructure of a vital part of our national greatness and national well-being, not less in various other fields—in the fields of law and jurisprudence and in a lesser degree in Mathematics, in the realm of social reform and in the forward march of a newborn nationalism. No where, indeed, one might say in the India of today is to be met with such a unique personality in whom have risen and blended, the fearless reformer and the patient pioneer, the great thinker and the steadfast worker, the brilliant lawyer, the learned Judge and the renowned jurist, a reputed scientific and literary scholar, an eminent mathematician and a literateur, a profound idealist and a very practical, tenacious and struggling individual, a high official and a selfless patriot, a nationalist to the core of his



being, a sure judge of men and things, a born ruler and leader of men as also of thought, a constructive and organizing genius, a man of lofty ideas and high principles as well as a master of the minutest details, a high priest of Indian nationalism and an architect of the nation in making, almost a seer and a sage at times.



CHAPTER II.

Early Life.

The ancestral home in Hooghly district—His father, Ganga Prosad—Asutosh's birth—His father's interest in him—The influence of illustrious men on his infant mind—his early ambitions—His mother—His eminent tutors—His admission into high school, its famous Head Master and assistant Head Master—His varied reading and early fame, his proficiency in Mathematics—the boy becomes a Member of London Mathematical Association—his love of study.

For the proper understanding of the personality as well as the achievements of a great man, we must know the story of his life. We do not, however, propose to delineate, or deal with, the life-story of Asutosh in its fuller details and grandeurs; we leave to his biographer the privilege of narrating the story of his life, and of setting forth in due order and importance, the various, complex and innumerable incidents of his day-to-day-life, as he lived it. Let us bear in mind the more important and outstanding facts of his life, so that we may be all the better able to understand the man, appreciate his personality and judge his worth and his achievements; curiously enough, notwithstanding his complex character, his versatile personality, his meteoric rise, his brilliant career and varied works in life, the story of his life is, indeed, a very simple one from the very beginning to the end and can be, unlike others, told in brief.



Asutosh's father, Dr. Ganga Prasad Mukherjee, came of a very old and respectable Brahmin family that lived at and hardly stirred out of a village, in the district of Hooghly in Bengal—it is called Jirat-Balagar and is situated by the side of the sacred river of the Hindus—the Ganges. Towards the end of the year 1836, Ganga Prosad was born in the village home of his family. Rural Bengal, in those good old days was—not as it is today poverty-stricken, disease-ridden,—but a happy place to live in; the villages, big and small—not excepting the one we are just concerned with—were, in a word, flowing with milk and honey, abounding with fruits and flowers, fishes and vegetables; they were the very dwelling places of health and happiness—the veritable home of beauties and glories of Nature, characteristic of Bengal, particularly of rural Bengal; and the villagers lived in their placid but not 'pathetic' contentment, knowing few wants, little worries or cares or troubles that hang round our necks like a millstone now-a-days. Their outlook was narrow, and the horizon of their knowledge and experience, limited to a degree. They hardly went abroad; they scarcely came out of their homes—quite and peaceful as far as possible; they lived and passed their simple and uneventful life in their little circles, in their pleasant surroundings.

But Ganga Prosad left the beaten track. Endowed with a remarkable independence of spirit and



resoluteness of action, fired with higher ambitions and hopes than could be realized within the orbit of his rural abode, he proved the exception to the general rule—that of staying at home, following the common path. His innate thirst for knowledge, his profound love of learning, his striking aspirations—striking in a rural boy in those good old days—and his keen yearning for a larger and more glorious life drove him to Calcutta, 'the London of the East', where one could find ample scope for one's genius and talents, where there was, in that period, sufficient room for all sorts and conditions of men. But Calcutta in those by-gone-days was not surely the city of palaces as it is today; Calcutta was extremely unhealthy, dark and dirty—not exactly an enviable place to live in, so far as the common and poorer section of the people was concerned at any rate. Houses, no habitable and worthy, lanes and streets filthy and uncared for, jungles here and there, and a periodic, if not continuous prevalence of various diseases, were the characteristic features of the then capital of British India. All these and many other difficulties and disadvantages notwithstanding, Ganga Prosad came down to Calcutta to prosecute his studies; once settled here, nothing could make him swerve an inch from his chosen path—from his determination to rise into eminence. This spirit of adventure, this indifference to hardships and privations, this tenacity of purposes, this urge of a high ideal, this pursuit of a



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lofty aim—which drove him to leave his quiet and happy ancestral home in the village for a dubious career, for a hard life of struggle in Calcutta and which were the more salient features of his son's personality—marked the father out, from the very outset, as one destined to be great; and great he was not only in his own life—in the profession he followed, but great—greater still—as the father of one of the greatest and most brilliant men our country has produced in our times. Ganga Prosad graduated in 1861; and an excellent and comfortable post under Government, he could have easily secured, just as most of the first batches of the graduates had done; and thus was an easy, comfortable—almost luxurious—life within his easy reach, one, moreover, without much of the trials and tribulations the ups and downs that generally fall to the lot of a struggling individual in an independent profession. But then, he was not one of those ordinary, easy going and matter-of-fact people. He got himself admitted into the Calcutta Medical College and thus chalked out a path for himself, full of uncertainties and difficulties and struggles that prove quite a stumbling block to many an aspiring and ambitious youth. While Ganga Prosad was in his Third Year class in the Medical College, Asutosh was born in the early morning of the 29th June 1864, in a rented house in Malanga Lane, Bowbazar. The baby that grew into one of the stoutest and strongest man in Bengal—the Bengal Tiger—was, during



the first few years of its life, sickly to a degree, and it was only the unremitting and incessant care and vigilance of its noble and loving mother that kept its body and soul together. The then extremely alluring prospects of Government service in the Medical Department once more failed to attract the young, aspiring and independent youth, Ganga Prosad, after he had taken his Degree of Bachelor of Medicine, in 1866,—he once more elected to live an independent life, following the profession he qualified himself for.

The advice of some of his relatives and well-wishers who resided in the locality, induced him to settle at Bhowanipur, and by dint of his perseverance and skill, his knowledge and tact, he was able to make his mark in his profession in no time; he rose into eminence and fame, as a matter of course. As the years rolled by, his fair name and skill travelled all over the city and its suburbs and he began to enjoy a very extensive practice, he built the large mansion at the present Road (named after Asutosh) and took up his residence at the new building in 1880—the building which was the home of Asutosh, for, by far, the greater part of his life. As an eminent and successful practitioner, Ganga Prosad's was necessarily a very busy and active life; nevertheless, he found time to do many things beyond the sphere of his profession and in spite of his swelling practice. He was a pioneer in vernacular medical literature and is still remembered for his medical work in Bengali—'Chikitsa Prokasa'.



Ganga Prosad took, from the beginning, a very keen and profound interest in the education of his infant son; one day after his return from his school, the infant Asutosh told his father that he would not go to that school any longer; the students were huddled together in such a manner and there was so much noise and confusion that it was more a 'Jattra' (native theatrical) party than a school. If any child was the father of the man, Asutosh, surely was one; here was to be found the promise and potentialities of the great educational reformer in his very fifth year; at this complaint of his son, Ganga Prosad moved the school authorities and had this evil remedied. Ganga Prosad bade and made his son rise very early in the morning and took him with himself when he would take his morning constitutional; and this habit of his son acquired in his childhood endured to the very end of his crowded and strenuous life. At the infant school, Asutosh finished his course within a much shorter period than his fellow students. From his early infancy Asutosh showed unmistakable signs of his intellectual ascendancy, his love of knowledge and his keen yearning for a fuller and higher life that constituted the corner-stone of his complex character. After his studies were finished at the infant school, Ganga Prosad did not get his son admitted into a high school lest his son—the infant prodigy—would be spoiled by bad company or would have to wait too long to keep pace with the progress



of the ordinary students; so he took upon himself to supervise the boy's education at home and engaged very earnest and competent private tutors. The early days of his infancy were really a very important period in the life of the man; this was the formative period—the germinating time—when were sown the seeds of future greatness and glory, of the noble aspirations and lofty idealism, which, under fostering care and favourable circumstances, not only sprouted out but grew into a mighty and majestic tree in after life. Ganga Prosad may justly be called an ideal and worthy father of the ideal and worthy son, Asutosh; he took minutest care of, and gave the greatest attention to, the proper education of the infant prodigy that his son really was; he contributed, by every possible means, by example and precept by affection and supervision, to the development of his intellectual powers, to the building of his character and to the unfolding of his mind. No doubt, he earned a lot of money; many people, also, possess or amass a lot and some on, a far larger scale; but then how many of his country men—his well-to-do and rich country men—take up the education of their boys, so seriously and so earnestly? In the course of his morning walk, at the intervals of his frequent professional calls, he would snatch, not simply moments—but quite a good many minutes even hours—to imprint, to impress, upon the infant mind of his son, much that was good and noble, lofty and wholesome; thus he would encourage



and urge his aspiring son to go onward in his studies, to march forward in his life; thus would he hold up before his mind's eye a great ideal—the ideal of greatness to be achieved, the ideal of a noble life to be lived. And thus not leaving his child at the tender mercies of the overworked, half-fed school master not by burying him in a heap of books of all sorts and conditions—as is the case with most of the boys—but by his own affectionate exertion and personal supervision he enabled the noble infant soul to unfold itself in various ways. As he was making rapid strides in the progress of his education at home, the presence there, of many men of light and leading men of fame and eminence, appealed to boy's infant imagination, stirred his aspirations, urged and convinced him that he also could 'make his life sublime.' It was the presence and company of that great Bengali jurist and Judge,—one whose judgments have acquired almost classical authority and who, as an intimate friend of Dr. Ganga Prosad, visited his place frequently—Mr. Justice Dwarka Nath Mitter—that made him aspire to a seat on the Bench of the premier High Court of India; and this, quite in his infancy! Henceforth, the glorious prospects of High Court Judgeship and the Premchand Roychand Studentship—the blue ribbon of the Calcutta University—fascinated him and drowned all other thoughts in his mind. And a seat on the Bench was, at that time, the utmost and most exalted position that the children of the soil could aspire to; thus



Asutosh pitched his ambition into the highest key; he did not aim at second best; and this act of his infant mind grew into a strong—almost irresistible—habit and characteristic of the man that remained throughout his career and paved the way for much of the success that he won; this high ambition, this lofty ideal that took complete possession of the infant—at the period of life, though formative and impressionable, when the vast majority of the children care little for anything but play and recreation—proved ultimately to be the foundation and plinth of the future achievements. Apart from this loftiness of the ideal and ambition in life, the boy Asutosh brought a rare thoroughness, an uncommon earnestness and resolution to bear upon his studies at home, and his father was exceedingly careful of the company his son kept; he was convinced—as it is only too true and painfully true—that nothing works more havoc on, nothing injures the mentality and spoils the character of, infants and youths, more than the evil company of the bad and mischievous elements in society; so he kept his son—and took good care to do it—at an arm's length from this great source of mischief and misery. The boy, moreover, was fortunate in having as his mother a high-souled lady who was altogether above the ordinary, and different from the common, run of women; she was a pious, good-natured, devoted and careful mother, unlike those who would spoil their children with too much affection and too much licence; what with the presiding angel of his



mother, what with an eminent man and famous physician as a father, what with the presence of the many of the elite of the city as the latter's friends, the boy Asutosh was never in want of inspiration, example and advice ; under these happy auspices, began and progressed the instruction and education of the future intellectual giant, the hero of work and independence, in the most impressionable years of his early life ; and no wonder, he was advancing, in his studies, by leaps and bounds, till his progress was arrested, for some time, by an unforeseen circumstance - his sudden illness ; he began to suffer from palpitation of heart ; Ganga Prosad was much concerned about his infant son, and under European medical advice, he sent him to Mathura for a change ; at this place not only was he enabled to recruit his health but he was said to take three seers of milk daily ; few grown-up boys and adults are capable of taking so large a quantity of milk, today and this healthy, splendid appetite did not leave him through life.

At Mathura, the welcome change of climate and surroundings, the beautiful scenery and fresh atmosphere cheered him a good deal, and he was not only restored to his health and vigour - but he became doubly healthy and vigorous. On their way back, Asutosh and those who went with him, broke their journey at Benares and stayed there for a few days ; here he was fortunate enough to meet the late illustrious countryman of ours, Isswar Chandra Vidyasagore of revered memory ; Asutosh had

heard much of Vidyasagore, now that he saw him, great was the impression upon his infant mind of that prince of men. Once more he met him, after some time, at Messrs. Thaker Spink and Co's at Calcutta; here Vidyasagore presented him with an excellent copy of Robinson Crusoe and asked him to read it carefully. This present was cherished by Asutosh all his life as a precious memento and it still forms a valuable part of heirloom that he left his family. A sure judge of men and things as he was, Vidyasagore was keenly interested in, and much impressed with, the infant prodigy. After his return from Mathura, Ganga Prosad resolved to get his son admitted into a high school, and his choice, naturally enough, fell upon the South Subarban School; for not only was the school close by, but it was noted for the quality of its teaching and care taken for the boys; and it was also famous for the eminence and learning of its Head Master—Sj Sibnath Sastry—who became one of the most respected writers, thinkers, and reformers of the nineteenth century Bengal, as also on account of its second master—the late lamented Ashutosh Biswas who rose to be a leading pleader at Alipur and met an untimely and tragic death at the hands of some Bengali anarchists. Asutosh was quite fit for the Third Class, but he was taken into the Fourth Class, as he was considered too young for the former. By dint of the innate thoroughness—which was one of his characteristics in afterlife—the inquisitiveness of his



mind as well as the constant watch and wholesome advice of his father, the boy began to master his lessons quickly and showed considerable aptitude for many things beyond the range of his studies, such as for instance, for mathematics. Ganga Prosad engaged a learned professor, Sj Panchanon Paldhi, to coach him in Sanskrit literature and grammar. Knowing as he did the lofty ambition of his son to be a High Court Judge, Ganga Prosad wished his son to be a Vakil and in order to rise to the highest rung of the legal ladder, a vakil must be a good and impressive speaker and must have sufficient command of English. But strange as it may seem—for his was the one of the very few voices in the India of today that thundered forth its majestic eloquence and unique independence delivering the message of freedom, and culture and of intellectual regeneration, at Mysore, at Bangalore, at Benares, at Lucknow, at Lahore and at Calcutta—Asutosh was rather shy of speech in boyhood; so Ganga Prosad taught him how to deliver a speech, effectively, by bidding him stand on a stool by the side of a table; he also taught him how to pronounce English words correctly, by the help of a Chamber's Dictionary. Thus was the way paved for the rise of the Bengal Tiger whose commanding eloquence was looked forward to eagerly by thousands of his countrymen and it was echoed and reechoed through the length and breadth of the land. The renowned professor Sj Gangadhar Bannerji and the famous ex-Minister and public man



of Bihar—Sj. Madhusudhan Das M.A., B.L., C.I.E., who gave up his high post for the sake of his conviction—were among his interested private tutors at this period; Asutosh was, of course, not content with the progress of his studies at the school but extended his range of reading a good deal. His knowledge of, and aptitude for, History, Sanskrit, English and Mathematics were far in advance of his fellowstudents. His life-long studious habit that made him bury himself, in his spare times, in a heap of books, was strengthened at this time and he began to have a great liking for serious literature and thoughtful books.

While a student of the First Class he suffered rather badly from a good many boils all over his body. This was a great hinderance to him in his preparations for the coming Entrance Examination and he had almost to put a stop to the vigorous prosecutions of his studies for sometime; in consequence he could not secure the very first place in the Examination in 1879, at which he aimed and which he was expected, in the ordinary circumstances, to have won; instead he stood second. It was a matter of no little regret—it was a keen disappointment to him thus to have failed to carry off the highest laurels in the first University Examination. But the chief point to be noted in connection with the school life and school education of the boy who became a great intellectual giant and a hero of independent action and thinking in afterlife, was the outstanding fact that he was miles in advance of his



brethren; he not only mastered, or acquired a remarkable proficiency in, quite a large number of subjects--much too large for his fellow students--but he was also capable of sound and profound thinking on many serious matters; he had already formed and had his own opinions and views on many momentous questions, and like Disraeli and other great men, when his seniors and fellow students were enjoying themselves with various idle and unproductive things or reading all sorts of novels and sensational books, Asutosh developed, in a marked degree, an abiding taste for serious literature, an extraordinary studious habit and love of learning for its own sake; during this period, he had already chalked out a line of action for himself and meditated deeply upon the conditions of success and glory, and went on advancing steadily--sometimes a bit too rapidly.

He would be engaged in his studies from fifteen to eighteen hours a day; and his fame as a mathematical scholar spread far and wide--it reached England. While yet a school boy, he found himself a member of London Mathematical Association; he sent them many solutions of their problems and many were the prizes that fell to his lot; and most of his solutions were really good and quite original and were treated as genuine contributions to the study of Mathematics--they were called 'Mookerjee's Theorems.' These school-life achievements of Asutosh still find favour at the renowned centre of mathematical



studies—the University of Cambridge where they are included in the curriculum. His extraordinary talent and originality as a mathematician were manifested quite early in his life. Sj. Annadaprosad Bosu, M.A., was appointed a senior teacher of Mathematics in the South Suburban School; and when he heard of the fame of his pupil, Asutosh, he wished to test him; with this end in view, he gave his boys, a very subtle and intricate problem of simultaneous equation with three unknown factors; Asutosh solved this difficult problem quite easily and then began to read other books; after a while Annada Babu desired to know if the problem had been solved by any one in the class; but he knew it quite well that only one of them was equal to it and it was no other than his talented pupil, Asutosh. Then he walked up to the board to explain the problem but what was his plight when he found himself unable to do it! after several futile attempts at solution and with a perspiring forehead, he had to copy the solution of Asutosh; the teacher never, afterwards, forgot this defeat at the hands of his pupil.

Asutosh's innate and insatiable love of work and love of learning—and his strong abhorrence of idleness—were manifest quite early. Once it so happened on an auspicious day of Swaraswati Puja that Asutosh and his younger brother, Hemanta Kumar, disagreed as to whether the day was to be spent in festivities and enjoyments or in reading and



learning new things ; Asutosh held that the proper way of worshipping the Goddess of Learning was in profound devotion to learning and studies, and not in idle enjoyments and pleasures ; his brother wanted to give up all work and study, and spend the day in festivities. A reference being made to their father, Ganga Prosad bade both his sons join the other boys at the temple of Swaraswati.



CHAPTER III.

Academic Career.

Asutosh's admission into the Presidency College, its fame, its staff, its library and its students—Publication of his thesis in England—the range of his studies—his peculiar illness and recovery at Gajipur—His fresh illness—The result of I. A. Examination—Asutosh, a vegetarian—His early interest in University affairs—He takes the more difficult course in B. A.—his activities at the College—His achievements in B. A., M. A., P. R.S. M. A. (science)—His interview with the Director of Public Instruction and refusal of service—Joins City College as a law student—Interview with Vice-Chancellor—At the auction sale of a library—Articled to Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh.

Presidency College of Calcutta in the early eighties of the last century maintained its high—one might say highest—position among the educational institutions of the province, notwithstanding the highly eminent and even brilliant staff of many private colleges in and outside Calcutta. Those were the days of the first brilliant batches of graduates, and many of them—there were too many to name—were on the staff of the private Colleges. But the Presidency College had also many to be proud of; Mr. Tawney, who was the Principal, the old Dr. Booth, Messrs. Rowe, Macann, Elliot, Webb, Pearycharan Sircar, Prosanna Kumar Sarbadhicari, Perceval and others, were wellknown as much for their scholarship as for their solicitude for the student's wellbeing; it is a



long established fashion both among the best students and those coming of rich and noted families, to prosecute their studies at the Presidency College; so as a matter of course, Asutosh got himself admitted into its First Year Class in the year 1880. To compare great things with small, like Oxford and Cambridge, the Presidency College has been attracting most of the boys of the wealthy and aristocratic families—as also the sons of famous and rising men. Among the contemporary students were many who rose into eminence and made their mark in the public life of the country, such as : Byomkesh Chakravarty, Asutosh Chaudhuri, Bhupendra Nath Bose, Heramba Chandra Moitra, Satyendra Prosanna Sinha, Profulla Chandra Roy, Suresh Prosad Sarvadhicari, Abdar Rahim, Sumsul Huda and others. Many of the students—specially of the richer class rolled in wealth and luxury and would come to College in rich clothes and newer and newer things, making themselves happy and comfortable as much as they could; and unlike Oxford and Cambridge and many other British Universities which supply the one familiar soil for easy but profound friendship, which lasts through life, among the rising intellectuals and future leaders of men in the United Kingdom, no friendship worth the name, sprang up between any of his easy-going and ease-loving college chums and Asutosh who was a very quiet, unostentatious, simple and serious-minded student, always deadly earnest in his studies, burying himself in his



books all the time. His admission into the Presidency College was said by Asutosh to be a primary cause of his future eminence in life ; it was, no doubt, true to some extent at any rate. Here, not only was he enabled to sit at the feet of various teachers who formed a galaxy of gifted scholars of varied intellectual attainments and talents,—and their personal interest in, and close and intimate touch with him went a long way to urge, encourage and stimulate his youthful mind ; but its immense library with its countless books and numerous periodicals, was also a great factor in his collegiate education ; he would often wonder if it was given to any single human being to go through the sea of books on all possible subjects that human mind and human intelligence have been able to dwell on. Naturally enough, he would pass most of his time there, absorbed in reading.

Henceforth, Asutosh resolved and began to master Mathematics thoroughly ; he felt a keen desire to send to England his occasional writings and the problems he worked out, to publish them in British periodicals, and he actually sent a mathematical thesis to the 'Cambridge Messenger of Mathematics', which, though written five years before, was duly published. His love of learning and his intellectual capacities were so great and rare that he went through all the books prescribed for the M. A. Examinations in Mathematics as well as many masterpieces in English literature, such as Chaucer (text book for the M. A. in English). A fellow student of his was not a



little surprised to find him read Chaucer and said to him, "What are you doing Asu? you are reading Chaucer now! It is included in the M. A. course in English and you are now only in the First Year Class." Asutosh promptly replied, "One day I must take the M. A. course in English, what harm in reading it now?" In this way he would take time by the forelock and be in advance of his fellowmen; he, however, felt soon that in order to be a good and sound mathematician, one must learn French; for, not only Laplace but also many other pre-eminent mathematicians have produced numerous standard works on Mathematics in French; so Asutosh began, by his own exertion, to learn, and read a good many books in, French; he even acquired some knowledge of German. Mathematics, was, undoubtedly, his favourite subject now and hereafter, but English and Sanskrit literatures as well as Science claimed his attention no less. History, also, attracted him considerably and time and often, he would be profoundly absorbed in its study and contemplation. Nor was the lesson of History lost upon him, trained and accustomed as he was from his boyhood, to exact sciences. He sufficiently profited by the study of history to have within his grasp, not only a faithful story of the past, not only a narration of the important events of the dim and distant past long passed off, or of the epochs and centuries recently gone, not only a consistent and connected account of the deeds and doings of his fellowmen that are



no more, or a sound knowledge of their arts and sciences, their institutions and their philosophy; but he was able, by his study of History, to arrive at a correct theory of the rise and fall of nations, and of civilizations and cultures of the different peoples on earth. And this study of history in this higher and wider and fuller sense—and the profound knowledge and the broad outlook that he gained therefrom,—made him a liberal-minded and far-sighted statesman, and a sage, even a seer that he undoubtedly was in his better mind ! And it was really due to his study and love of History, as much as to his patriotism, that he was actuated, quite early in life, with a strong desire, and moved by an irresistible will, to have the broken and scattered fragments of his country's ancient history, woven together into a faithful and live picture of its hoary civilization and culture in the various phases and in their different aspects, so as to mirror India to her own children, and enable her to regain her soul lost in age-long slumber.

Dr. Ganga Prosad made it a point to go to bed at ten in the evening. He enjoined upon his son to sleep early; but a little after the father was abed, Asutosh used to light his lamp and continue his studies quite late in the night, and thus he would keep up late hours from day to day, without the knowledge of his father as well as of other members of the family. One day, however, in the dead of night, his father found him not only wide awake but absorbed in reading.



amidst a heap of books ; he mildly took his son to task and pointed out that Nature does not let them who disobey her laws, go scot free, rather she punishes them severely. But this habit of studying late in the night—this sort of mental labour and intellectual strain—which was more than ordinary human constitution could stand, told upon his health badly, and he was attacked with a most painful malady in the brain, which went from bad to worse as the summer set in and progressed ; Dr. Ganga Prosad took minutest care in the treatment of his son, but to no effect ; so he sent him away for a change of climate and surroundings to Gajipur, where his own brother was the District Engineer. With the increase of atmospheric heat, the disease took such a serious turn that he would be quite senseless for sometime, but as the rains set in, it showed signs of lessening. Gajipur is noted—or was noted at the time—for its beautiful roses ; the sweet fragrance and soothing beauty of the cluster of roses that bloomed in profusion there, by the side of which he would take his walk, went a long way in the recruitment of his shattered health ; but it was really an accident that cured him of his serious and troublesome malady ; it was rather curious it so happened that one morning, a furious black bee came rushing upon him on its swift wings, it came from a heave near by, which was stoned by another fellow, but the angry bee supposed poor Asutosh to be the culprit and stung him so severely that he dropped down senseless, and the advice and assistance of all present, including



those of the attending physician, could not bring him back to his senses ; he came back to himself after a lapse of twentyfour hours ; he opened his eyes, as though he rose from his swoon, a new man—a dead weight having gone down from his head. The doctors agreed that the poison of the bee destroyed the poison that caused the disease. Asutosh's trouble and illness were not, however, over ; after his return from Gajipur, he was attacked with typhoid and though he was cured, after sometime, under the able treatment of eminent physicians, he was too weak for any mental or physical labour ; his examination—I. A—was near at hand ; too weak and enfeebled as he was, he was not dissuaded from appearing at it ; the condition of his health and constitution at this time, may be judged by the fact that he had to be stimulated in the course of the examinations, with the help of an electric battery, and when the result was out, one and all were surprised to find his name not only appearing among the successful candidates, but being placed Third in order of merit ; that he stood Third, notwithstanding all those adverse circumstances—his prolonged and serious illnesses that would have surely prevented an ordinary man from putting in an appearance, from succeeding, at any rate, and that necessitated an electric battery to stimulate his strength to stand the strain of examination—was, indeed, more than his best well-wishers could expect ; it was truly a marvellous fact. The result



of his examination did, of course, exceed the highest anticipations of all, but it is no surprise to us, now that we have the whole of his extraordinary career before us. Two events of this period need a special mention here ; after his illness that affected his brain, Asutosh who, in the course of his preparations for his examination and in the midst of his serious and multifarious studies, had had enough of mental labour and intellectual strain gave up fish and flesh and became a strict and simple vegetarian, and it was not until after a lapse of twenty years in 1900 that he was almost forced to take to fish, at the importunities of his doctors—as he was badly attacked with diarrhoea. In the year 1881 his uncle Sj. Radhika Prosad Mukherjee became a Fellow of the Calcutta University ; this was indeed a turning point in the drama of his life, and thus began a connection between the University and his family which not only proved to be the most momentous in its history but is happily, continuing from generation to generation ; from this time, the dry and uninteresting minutes and the papers of the University that were sent to his uncle, Asutosh would go through, with breathless interest and attention. Thus from his very second year in the College, he began to acquaint himself with the details of the proceedings as also of the inner life and working of the University he was destined to reform, to reshape and renovate into the greatest temple of learning in Asia and one



of the most renowned centres of scholarship and research in the world.

The B. A. students of the period had to choose between two courses A and B ; 'A' course included English, Mathematics, Sanskrit, Philosophy, History and Additional Mathematics and the students had to take up English and Mathematics and any three among Sanskrit, Philosophy, History and Additional Mathematics. Besides English and Mathematics, 'B' course students had to choose any two subjects among Physics, Chemistry and Physical Geography. Owing to the inherent difficulty of getting very high marks in the 'A' course—as high as 'B' course—as also to the fact that the former included one subject more than the latter—though the total marks were same, no student could stand first in the B. A. Examination from 'A' course during a period of ten years from 1874—83, only with one solitary exception, that of Mr. Canady. Asutosh was, now, determined to make good his failure—no doubt under circumstances altogether beyond his or other's control—in the two previous University Examinations, by scoring the highest place in the B. A. He took the more difficult 'A' course, leaving the easier 'B' course ; indeed it grew into a habit characteristic of him to shun the easy path, and take to the more arduous, more difficult one, for as he said on a famous occasion after a lapse of forty years, 'the more difficult and perilous the duty', the greater its charms and attractions ; and throughout his crowded life, the more onerous the



responsibilities, the more thorny his path, the more was he attracted to, the more did he delight in, them.

Dr. William Booth, the well-known Mathematician, was at that period, the professor of the Mathematics at the Presidency College, and Asutosh was not only a pupil to his liking but one quite after his heart; he was a great teacher, an earnest friend of the students, an erudite scholar and simple-minded man. One day it so happened that he actually read 75 pages of a difficult book in such a hurried way that other students who had also taken up Additional Mathematics, could not at all follow the learned professor and gave up the subject; but as the book was already read by him long before, Asutosh found it not at all difficult to keep pace with the progress of his teacher, who, between them, went so far as to finish the books prescribed for the M. A. Examination also. Asutosh was now determined to profit by his very painful previous experiences of the regrettable effects of excessive reading; he did not forget this time what a terrible pass he was brought to by too much mental labour and too much reading that he freely indulged in; now he took much care to observe the rules necessary to preserve his health, and he took exercises and walks regularly; whenever he had leisure, he would repair to the college library and be absorbed in the useful and thoughtful books; he was always full of wonder and admiration to see the huge collection of books there, and felt a keen desire to possess his own library at home, and a very good



one too ; and afterwards he had the satisfaction of having a very large and rich library—if not the largest and richest possessed by a private individual in India. Among the periodicals, that were brought out to the College, the 'Educational Times' attracted his attention considerably for in that paper, many eminent and learned men of Europe, published many problems and articles, while others sent replies ; Asutosh was also strongly inclined to send to it, his own articles and his answers to other's problems ; in 1883 he sent his "Extension of Theorem of Solmons" to the "Cambridge Messenger of Mathematics." A brilliant and versatile scholar as he was at the college, Asutosh was not a student merely confined to his books ; occasionally he gave excellent proof his organizing capacities and debating faculties. On the death of one of his professors—Dr. Hugh Macann—he raised a subscription and placed, in his memory, a marble tablet in the Library Hall and delivered an eloquent and impressive speech at meeting held to mourn his loss ; he was also an active and prominent figure in the College Debating Club in which he developed his powers of expression and argument. Next year 1883 in the B. A. Examination his hopes and aspiration were fulfilled and he stood first scoring very high marks in all the subjects—he obtained 96 out of 100 in Philosophy, hitherto unknown. As we have already said, Asutosh aspired to the Premchand Roychand Studentship, but it was



now proposed to utilize the decent amount that is usually given to the P. R. S. men by sending some students to England for some higher courses of study; Asutosh did not at all like the idea and published an anonymous article, adducing very strong reasons against the proposal, refuting the arguments of its supporters; it was ultimately dropped by the Syndicate, after they had read Asutosh's article. At this time, Mr. Surendra Nath Bannerjee was sent to prison, and when he came out, after serving his term, the whole of Calcutta was stirred to the utmost and numerous meetings were held; Asutosh was drawn into the agitation and spoke at two different meetings, as we have referred to before. He was also attracted to Theosophy and read it for three years. The fashion of taking a 'chadar' on was common enough at that time; Asutosh also used to take it, though he was not anxious for it; but after a fall from a tram car, for which he had to thank his flowing 'chadar', he gave up the habit of taking it, without at all caring for the jests and smiles of his fellow-students; and this is the point to be noted in this connection; the predominant trait in his character—that of sticking to his decisions and carrying them out, caring little for the frowns and favours of his fellow-men, great or otherwise—was already fairly developed. The very next year he appeared at the M. A. Examination in Mathematics and stood first. Asutosh's versatile and profound scholarship was, by this time, well-known



in academic circles and received due recognition at the hands of the University authorities. The Hon'ble Mr. C. P. Ilbert—Vice-Chancellor—referred to the brilliant young scholar, in the course of his Convocation Address thus, "In the M. A. examination, Mr. Asutosh Mookerjee to whose achievements my predecessor referred in 1884, maintained his pre-eminence as a Mathematician and for the sake of the profession to which I belong I am glad to see that he has devoted himself to the study of law and has carried off the gold medal recently offered for competition among law students by my friend Moharaja Sir Jotindra Mohan Tagore." He was then appointed an examiner in M. A. (in Mathematics), within a year of his passing the M. A. examination. In 1886 he appeared at the P. R. S. examination—the highest in the University—with Mathematics, mixed Mathematics, and Science, and he was awarded the very handsome prize of Rs. 10,000, attached to the highly honoured and coveted degree (P. R. S.); he was anxious to appear, again, at the M. A. examination in purely scientific subjects, and with the permission of the Senate, he sat for M. A. in physical science with no little success; it is superfluous to state that Asutosh's studies were not confined to his text books. He carried on a good deal of original thinking and from time to time sent his problems and his papers to the British periodicals for publications. He began now to attend the Tagore Law Lectures and showed



remarkable aptitude for Law, carrying off the gold medals for three years. The extraordinary character and achievements of the brilliant graduate, noted alike for the range of his reading and the depth of his learning, attracted considerable notice.

The Director of Public Instruction called him to his office, and offered him a post in the Educational line on Rs. 250, quite a decent salary to begin with, at that time. Asutosh told the high official, that highly honoured as he was by his kind offer, he could not all the same, bring himself to accept it, unless he was granted the same status and privilege as the members of the Indian Educational Service and unless it was also guaranteed that he would not have to serve outside Calcutta. Naturally enough the good Director was surprised and angry at this unreasonable and unnatural attitude of the promising Bengali youth. He said to Asutosh that the members of Indian Educational Service were recruited in England by the Secretary of State ; so he could not appoint him to that Service but while serving in the subordinate service, Asutosh could rise and might be promoted to it, and that a member of the Educational Service like members of other Services are bound to be transferred. He however asked Asutosh what line he would take up and Asutosh told him that he intended to be a Vakil ; whereupon Sir Alfred Craford—the Director—said that there were plenty of Vakils and Asutosh would not shine in their midst. But, unfortunately for him, he proved a false prophet.



as all the world knows. This refusal of the excellent offer of the comfortable berth with great prospects and possibilities both from the material and intellectual points of view—brings—or rather brought—into prominent relief the ideal, the independence and dignity of spirit, of the man. Why should he accept a back seat, in his own country's service, why should he rot in a subordinate position, while people far inferior to him in every respect, would enjoy a fat salary and luxurious position, over his head? It was, he considered, beneath his dignity and galling to his self-respect. But it is admitted on all hands today that had he accepted a professorship of Mathematics, his favourite subject, for which he developed extraordinary aptitude, he would have worked his way to the front rank of world mathematicians.

After getting the highest University degree and prize—P.R.S.—and sitting for M.A. in another subject he began to attend Law lectures in the City College and read Smriti in the Sanskrit College, in both of which he displayed considerable proficiency. It is to be noted here that there was quite a galaxy of brilliant intellect on the staff of the City College when Asutosh joined the lawclasses there. Annanda Mohun Bose, Kalicharan Bannerjee, Krisna Kamal Bhattacharyya, Dr. Guroo Das Bannerjee S. P. Sinha—(now Lord Sinha) were among the teachers at whose feet the redoubtable jurist-Judge sat and learned his lessons in law;



of the numerous Sanskrit works that Asutosh studied in original and acquired remarkable knowledge in, were Manu, Jajñabalka, Maitak-hara Dayavaga, Dattak Chandrika and others. Hon'ble Mr. C. P. Ilbert—the Member of Viceroy's Council and Vice-Chancellor—called him to his house one day and asked him if he would like him to do any thing for him (Asutosh). Any other youth thus asked by one of the few highest officials of the land, would have considered themselves thrice fortunate, and would have wrung from him promises that might have made for the realization of his high ambitions and aspirations in the world. But not only was Asutosh made up of different stuff, he was fascinated and fired by a different and higher idealism than mere material prosperity, worldly success or happiness. Thanks to his uncle's connection with the University, he was now well acquainted with the affairs of the University as well as with the working of the system and longed to be a Fellow; so he told the Hon'ble Member and Vice-Chancellor, to make him one. The former promised him his help, but as he went Home next year, Asutosh could not become a Fellow at that time. Another very interesting and instructive incident need special mention here. After the death of the then Surveyor-General in India in 1887—who, though a very busy official, was deeply interested in, and studied, Mathematics at home—his valuable library was being sold by auction. In that library, there



were two very rare and old French mathematical works which Asutosh made up his mind to buy, when the sale was going on, an European official came there and whispered something into the auctioneer's ears; in consequence the bid for the books rose very high and Asutosh's last was Rs. 100 and 150 for the two books. But the auctioneer kept them for the European official for Rs. 101 and 151, for the latter wanted them at all costs. This gentleman was no other than Mr. Justice O'kinaley who was very much surprised indeed, to have a bill for Rs. 252 for two old and worn-out books, and he was told, this unhappy fact was due to the eagerness of a young Vakil—Asutosh Mookerjee,—to have the books himself. Mr. Justice O'kinaley enquired of Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh if he knew a young Vakil—Asutosh Mookerjee, by name; Sj. Asutosh was by by this time articted to Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh and he sent the youngman to the learned Judge with a letter of introduction. Mr. Justice O'kinaley was delighted to meet the young Vakil and said to him that he did not require a letter of introduction, the two old books were sufficient introduction in themselves; then he presented Asutosh with those two valuable books that he made such a high bid for; since then, Mr. Justice O'kinaley remained a great friend of Asutosh.



CHAPTER IV.

Active Life and sudden End.

Asutosh becomes a Fellow—His election to the Syndicate in his 24th year—His memorable resolution for inclusion of Bengalee in the curriculum—His Doctorate—His appointment to the Tagore Professorship—His election to the Bengal Council and nomination to the Calcutta Corporation, he is returned to the Imperial Council—He makes his presence felt in the Council and the select Committee on the Universities Bill—His fight and attitude on it—His elevation to the Bench when he was 40 He becomes Vice-Chancellor—His subsequent reforms and labours in the University—his second Vice-Chancellorship—His manysided interests and wide activities—The University Commission—He becomes Acting Chief Justice—He retires early and takes up the Dumraon Case at Patna—His dramatic end—the last fateful journey to the place of his birth—the unique homage and nation-wide grief.

After having taken his degree in Law—B.L. - in 1888, Asutosh enrolled himself as a Vakil of the Calcutta High Court, and five years later, he was a Doctor of Law! He wrote to Mr. Ilbert at Home that he was not yet a Fellow of the University, anxious as he was to be one. Mr Ilbert replied to say that he had spoken of him to Lord Lansdowne—the Viceroy-elect—and when His Lordship came to India, Asutosh's modest aspiration and yearning for the Fellowship were fulfilled. But Dr. Booth who was one of the greatest of his friends, insisted on his becoming a member of the Syndicate, the election to this most important body of the University was



to take place within two months hence. Acting according to the advice of Mr. Booth, Asutosh saw his three other well-wishers—Drs. Guroodas Banerjee and Mohendra Lall Sircar as well as Mr. Justice O'Kinaley who alone, gave him encouragement and promised him help. Before the election took place, Mr. Justice O'Kinaley went Home but not without giving him advice, and asking him to depend upon Col. Jaret in the matter of election. Col. Jaret was true to his word and stood by Asutosh and helped him even when he was under the shadow of a most terrible bereavement the death of his only son. There was a pathetic and glorious touch in the words that this true Christian gentleman said to Asutosh when the latter went to him ; he said that God had given him a son, and He had taken him away ; but that was no reason why he should not do him (Asutosh) the good office he promised him. This rare spirit of charity, of resignation and of service that moved that high-souled Englishman was worthy of a true Christian!

Sir Alfred Craford who offered Asutosh an appointment on Rs. 250 presided at the meeting of the Senate at the time of election to the Syndicate. he was against Asutosh's election, but to no effect; Asutosh became a Member of the Syndicate, duly elected, when he was only 24—this was the first time in the annals of the University that so young a man was elected to its governing body. In 1892, Asutosh



brought forward a momentous resolution in the Senate for the adoption of Bengalee language and literature as a subject for all the University Examinations up to M. A., and he delivered a most eloquent and forcible speech on this memorable occasion but in vain ; he had to reckon with opposition from various quarters ; Bengalee Literature was rejuvenated and reborn only the other day and it had yet to fight its way to universal recognition ; the debate that followed in the Senate was a very keen one ; the Europeans and their supporters said that there was serious dearth of good books in Bengalee and it was not a good enough language, then both the Pundits—champions of Sanskrit—and Mahomedans opposed the proposition ; so his motion was defeated by 17 to 11. He had, however, the satisfaction enlisting the support and sympathy of one of the fathers of modern Bengalee Literature—Bankim Chandra Chatterjee the renowned novelist—and of other men of light and leading, such as Chandra Nath Bose, Mohendra Nath Roy, Rev. Dr. Macdonald, Mr. A. M. Bose and Pandit Hara Prosad Sastri. Defeated as he was at the beginning of his career he was not a man to be bent down under the weight of depression and disappointment, he held and clung to his ideal and his objective steadfastly and lived to see his cherished hopes fulfilled by getting our mother-tongues a place as honourable and as high as other languages in the University Curriculum.

We have followed our hero rather a little closely to the threshold of his career; we have seen him work his way not only to the deliberative body—the Senate—, but also to the executive,—the Syndicate—of the premier University of India; we have seen him enter the portals of the premier High Court of India, as well, as a promising member of the Vakil Bar, serving his apprenticeship sitting at the feet of the greatest Indian jurist of modern times, who was also one of the most brilliant men, and an eminent leader of our generation; we have seen him acquire a good deal of fame for his profound and wide reading and versatile scholarship, no less for the brilliance of his varied intellectual gifts and of his academic career; possessed as he was of a robust optimism and undying faith in the cause of his country, of a singular devotion to his ideal coupled with an iron tenacity of purpose, of an undaunted courage wedded to a resolute will—all of which began to be manifest in his words and actions—his rise into eminence was as good as guaranteed, it was only a question of time. So we will take a rapid retrospect of his subsequent career crowded as it was with multifarious activities and works, ideas and thoughts.* It is a career which has undoubtedly very few parallels in modern India, in the volume, variety and complexity of

* Many facts and incidents of his life will be dwelt on in the chapters following as we review his career and personality in their different aspects and in the various fields of his labours.



sustained intellectual labour, in the significance and excellence of its striving and lastly, in the magnitude of its output, and we will not dilate upon it at this stage, as it occupied so much of the public life of the country and was so much before the public gaze.

The Calcutta High Court was at the height of fame and glory during the period when Asutosh began his career and made his mark; Paul and Garth, Woodrofe and Jackson. W. C. Bonnerjee, and T. N. Palit, Lal Mohun Ghosh and Rash Behari Ghosh, Guroodas Banerjee and Amir Ali were among the race of giants who were the shining lights of its Bench and Bar. With an established reputation as a versatile scholar* Asutosh entered its portals and continued his legal studies with considerable enthusiasm and zeal, receiving in 1894 his Doctorate in Law at the hands of his University. Contrary to the prophesy of Sir Alfrad Craford he was rising into eminence and coming to the front rank of Vakils. Four years later he was appointed Tagore Professor of Law, one of the most privileged and honoured Chairs of the University, and only renowned jurists and learned and eminent lawyers are called upon to fill it from year to year; Herbert Cowell and Arthur Philips, Rash Behari Ghosh and Gwroodas Bannerjee, Amir Ali and Mohammad Yoosoof,

* His versatile scholarship, his love of learning and his eminence as a mathematician are treated in a separate chapter.



Federick Pollock and J. G. Woodrofe, Saroda Charan Mitter and Golap Chandra Sastri were among his distinguished predecessors in the exalted Chair; but very few of the Tagore Law Professors have been invited to the post so early in life, as Asutosh was. And his 'Law of Perpetuity in British India', embodying his illuminating Tagore Lectures is considered to be an authoritative and standard work on the subject. In 1899, Asutosh was elected to the Bengal Legislative Council to represent the Calcutta University, and he took a prominent part in criticising the Calcutta Municipal Bill—the famous Mackenzie Act, but when the Bill was placed on the Statute Book in the teeth of universal non-official opposition in and outside the Legislature, Asutosh was nominated to the Calcutta Corporation by the Government of Bengal; in 1901 he was again returned to the Bengal Council which now, sent him to the Imperial Legislative Council as their non-official representative. His popularity at this time may be judged by the fact that in the matter of election to the Imperial Council, he was able to defeat such notable leaders of public opinion and aristocracy as Mr S. N. Banerjee and the Moharaja of Darbhanga who is the premier noble man in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. On the floor of the Indian legislature, he at once made his presence felt and won an easy recognition of his personality by dint of his keen insight, his sure grasp of the principles underlying



the legislations, his grip of the realities of a situation, his forensic eloquence and his debating powers. His opposition to the reactionary legislative measures was vigorous and effective, and along with the late Mr. Gokhale, Asutosh led the Opposition—insignificant, no doubt it was, in numerical strength, in the face of overwhelming majority of official phalanx; he pressed and presented the Indian point of view, on the floor of the House, on the Select Committee for the short period he was there, with an eloquence and skill that made a strong impression on the Council as well as on the general public outside. When in January 1904, he took his seat in the Council, Hon'ble Mr. Raleigh who was the President of Lord Curzon's famous Universities Commission, had already introduced the Indian Universities Bill, based on the recommendations of the Commission; when the Commission sat at Calcutta, Asutosh was co-opted a member thereof, in consideration of his association with the Commission and with the Calcutta University—with the latter, for the last 16 years—as also of his well-known mastery of the intricacies and complexities of, and his unique acquaintance with, the life and working, of the Universities in India, he was at once placed on the Select Committee on the Bill. Mr. Gokhale who was already there found an able collaborator in Asutosh and they, between them, opposed the measure at every stage, moving scores of amendments one after another,



but to no effect. But there was a difference—though not a fundamental one—between the attitude of Mr. Gokhale and that of Dr. Mukhopadhyaya, as our hero was then called. As Mr. (now Sir) B. K. Bose, at present Vice-Chancellor of the Nagpur University,—who was also a Member of Supreme Council at that time wrote recently (in the *Calcutta Review*), to Mr. Gokhale, the Bill was thoroughly reactionary and retrogressive and be it said, the Indian public opinion was fully at one with him, in unreservedly condemning the various provisions of the Bill; in fact, the agitation that raged through the length and breadth of the land, following its introduction in the Council, was fierce and virulent; and the heat and dust of the controversy that ensued blurred the eyes of the Indian public, even those of the most level-headed and farseeing among them; but Asutosh alone, among the Indian public men and publicists, saw through the Bill; he was aware, along with others, that the Bill was ostensibly calculated to heighten the efficiency of the University, and its constituent institutions, to strengthen the academic element in the former at the cost of the nonacademic, to invest Government with powers of more stringent control and of management in most of the affairs of the University, and generally to improve the quality of higher education, at the cost of the quantity; the people saw in it an attempt to officialize the University and a menace to higher education,



he condemned all these provisions; but he discerned more than these; he found out in the provisions of the Bill much that he could take advantage of, to realize his great ideal of a truly teaching and research University to fulfil his dream of reviving the glories of Nalanda and Taskhasila, by turning his 'alma mater' into a great centre of learning and researches, original thinking and intellectual activity, from a mere examining and 'degree giving' institution. He thought, in the words of Sir Bipin Kristo Bose, the measure was an advance on the existing law, and deserved a trial; when the Bill came out of the Select Committee, it bore clear impress of Asutosh's constructive criticism and was, as the Hon'ble Member in charge of the Bill testified, 'in large part, his (Asutosh's) work.' It was one of the unique glories of Disraeli, to have foreseen, with an extraordinary flash of prescience, that the second Reform Act of the last century, would not weaken, but strengthen, the British Tory Party; similarly, it rebounded to his greatness as a politician of long vision that Asutosh foresaw the brilliant future of his University under the provisions of the new Act; what is greater still, he had the privilege of actually accomplishing the herculean task of transforming it into the flourishing the teaching and Research University that it now is.

In the same Year—1904—Asutosh was appointed a Judge of the Calcutta High Court; and the dream

of his boyhood, the ambition of his school days and college life was fulfilled in a very important and essential part; various explanations have been put forward of his translation to the Bench when he was only 40; one is that this was the preliminary necessary to this appointment to the Vice-Chancellorship, but his immediate predecessor was not a Judge and another is that Lord Curzon wanted to silence a formidable opponent; but the fact seemed to be that this exalted appointment; no doubt, at such an early age, was a natural reward of, and sequel to, his rapid eminence and his fame at the Bar—he was earning about Rs. 10 000 a month at this time; Lord Curzon took good deal of credit for his impartiality in the appointment, as he maintained, of one of his greatest critics to this highest judicial office.* But if his elevation to the Bench, was an undoubted acquisition to the High Court, the public life of the country in the arena of politics and in the realm of legislation, at any rate, was distinctly poorer; for with his elevation the promising career of a great politician and legislator as also, of a respected municipal Commissioner, was cut short; no doubt, he was not a politician at heart—not of the type that today, is more than common and he was not sorry to exchange the quiet, unostentacious, if trying and learned labours of one of His Majesty's judges for

* Review of his brilliant record as a Judge appears in a subsequent chapter.



the popular, 'checkered and sensational life of the politician. And he had also to give up much of his worries and activities; but he did not give up his mathematical studies and researches, and he pursued his favourite subject and continued his labours therein, whenever he could find time; his zeal for the betterment of the affairs of the University, his activities and anxieties for its reformation and renovation under the new Act, knew no abating but were on the constant increase. He was appointed to the Vice-Chancellorship as a matter of course. As we shall refer at considerable length to his momentous labours and his monumental works at the University, after he was raised to the Bench, we need only touch upon this part of his career, at the stage. After the passage of the Universities Bill the Senate of the Calcutta University failed to comply with its obligation to submit to the Government of India for their sanction, the draft Regulations concerning all matters connected with it. Then Asutosh was called upon to preside over a small but strong Committee appointed by the Government for the purpose of the preparation of Regulations. Under Asutosh's guidance, the Committee submitted the draft Regulations within a very short time, which were sanctioned by the Government of India in toto. The University was now at the parting of ways and the promulgation of the Regulations were the starting point.



of its future extensions and progress in a hundred directions. But the machinery created by the Regulations had yet to be put in motion—and many conflicting interests adjusted, many jarring voices and incongruous notes reconciled—and all these required a master pilot, a Roman hand, to steer the ship of the University clear of a thousand and one dangerous cliffs and treacherous shoals; and no wonder the choice of the Government fell upon Asutosh to reshape, reform and rejuvenate, the University in the light of the higher and nobler ideals and newer ideas. Thus in 1908 he was temporarily relieved of his official duties on the Bench and was deputed to the gigantic task of reorganising the University in accordance with the New Regulations and under the new Act. Asutosh—was also equal to the task and rose to his full height, applying himself heart and soul to the reorganization and reconstruction of the University; but of these later. The history of the University of Calcutta from the 1906 to 1914—the year of his assumption of the Vice-Chancellorship and that of his retirement from the office—the history of the enormous expansion of its functions, of the unheard-of development of its activities, of the heightening of its ideals and of its unprecedented progress in the realms of higher studies and—researches—is also the vital part of Asutosh's life-story. And we propose to deal with it in greater length hereafter.



Apart from the far-reaching results and immediate consequences of the great policy and programme he worked out, his Vice-Chancellorship, is memorable from another standpoint. During his regime and at his initiative quite a large number of pre-eminent personalities were admitted to the Honorary Degrees of the University; honouring these eminent persons—who were renowned savants and scientists, thinkers and writers, leaders of public opinion or royal personages—the University honoured and raised itself in the estimation of the world. Among the illustrious persons thus honoured by him were :—The Crown Prince of Germany, H. R. H. The Prince of Wales, Drs. Hermann Oldenberg, Forsyth, Paul Vinogradoff, Jacobi, Sylvain Levi, Young, Rash Behari Ghosh, Tagore, Paranjpye, Raman, Mrs. Besant. Mrs. Naidu and Pandit Malaviya were also offered Doctorate but declined to accept the honour on political grounds.

During their brief stay in Calcutta, Their Majesties the King-Emperor and Queen-Empress, were pleased to receive an Address from the University; and it was the proud privilege of Asutosh as Vice-Chancellor to read and present the Address to Their Majesties. In course of a striking reply, His Majesty made the following oft-quoted and inspiring utterance ;—“ Six years ago I sent from England to India a message of Sympathy. Today in India I give to India the watchword of Hope. On every side I trace the signs and stirrings of



new life. Education has given you hope; and through better and higher education you will build up higher and better hopes. It is my wish that there may be spread over the land a net work of Schools and Colleges, from which will go forth loyal and manly and useful citizens, able to hold their own in industries and agriculture and all the vocations of life. And it is my wish, too, that the homes of my Indian subjects may be brightened and their labour sweetened by the spread of knowledge with all that follows in its train, a higher level of thought, of comfort and of health. It is through education that my wish will be fulfilled, and the cause of education in India will ever be close to my heart." These memorable words addressed to the Calcutta University serve as beacon light to the Universities and educationists in India.

We need hardly state that his interests and his activities in the affairs of his 'alma mater' continued unabated, even after his manly refusal of the offer of Vice-Chancellorship to Lord Lytton in 1923—in a historic letter which will go down to posterity as the embodiment of all that is best and noblest in Indian manhood; as the most important member of the Syndicate and Senate, he laboured and thought for his University till the very last days, nay even the last hours, of his life. Ever since he was appointed to the Vice-Chancellorship in 1906—and even before he was called to this exalted and onerous position—whether in office or



out of it—Asutosh never ceased to be the dominant figure and commanding personality in the affairs of the University, in the Senate, on the Syndicate on the Committees. He was succeeded by Dr. Deva Prosad Sarbadhicari; as we shall see at a later stage, in Dr. Sarbadhicari's regime, the Government of India appointed a Committee to advise them as to best way of consolidating the Post-Graduate Departments; and Asutosh was again called upon to preside over this important Committee. Dr. Sarbadhicari was succeeded by Dr. Nil Ratan Sircar. Then the Hon. Sir Lancelot Sanderson (C. J. Bengal) was prevailed upon to take over the burden of the Vice-Chancellorship. But with the inauguration of the Councils of Post-Graduate Studies in Arts and Science, Asutosh was all along elected to the Presidentship of the Councils as well as to the Chairmanship of their respective Executive Committees. He had also to preside over the Boards of Higher Studies in most of the branches as well as to act as Examiner and Paper setter in many subjects. During a period of nearly twenty years from the year of his assumption of his Vice-Chancellorship for the first time till his death, no matter whoever might be the business head of the University, Asutosh was a force to be reckoned with; it was his banner of the 'advancement of learning' that was being unfurled; it was his spirit that pervaded everything; it was his policy, his programme and his voice that prevailed.



And of the great idea that manifested itself, the great ideal that was in the process of realization, of the great object that was being fulfilled in the remodelling and reconstruction of the whole fabric and foundation of the University as well as in the building of its magnificent superstructure, Asutosh was the author and worker. And when the Non-co-operation movement was threatening the boycott of the educational institutions under the auspices of the Government, when it was extending its activities and its sway in all directions and the University was weighed down under its ravages, Asutosh was again called upon, by Lord Ronaldshay—with the willing concurrence of the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford—to assume the reins of office and save his University from the monster of the Non-co-operation Movement. It was, as he said, the greatest surprise of his life but he accepted the Vice-Chancellorship once more in 1921; his works and achievements of this second tenure of office will be dealt on at a later stage.

He was the second Indian—the first was the late Dr. Rajendra Lala Mitra—to be elected to the Presidentship of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, of which the late lamented Sir William Jones was the original President. Asutosh was subsequently elected to this office many times. In 1909 he was elected President of the Trustees of the Indian Museum as well as the President of the Board of Sanskrit Examiners in Bengal. He was selected as



the President of the Mohabodhi Society in Calcutta and he had the unique honour of receiving at the hands of Lord Ronaldshay, the earthly remains of Buddha ; he was also offered the Vice-Chancellorship of the proposed Buddhist University at Sarnath ; he was the Founder-President of the Calcutta Mathematical Society. Besides these multifarious activities over and above the permanent duties of his high judicial office and his labour of love at the University, he was connected with numerous educational institutions as President or member of their governing bodies. Then he was called upon to deliver his masterly addresses at various Universities of India, and on many important occasions, to preside over many public functions. Thus he was invited to deliver the inaugural addresses, at the Universities of Mysore and Lucknow and Convocation Addresses at those of Allahabad, Lahore and Benares. He was also invited to preside over the All-India Moslem Educational Conference but he could not accept the invitation as he was already appointed a member of the Calcutta University Commission and as such, he could not discuss in public the various problems and policy of education that he was expected to grapple with, along with his colleagues on the Commission. In his Presidential Address at the Bengalee Literary Conference at Bankipore, he delivered a most eloquent and impressive address that breathes a spirit of patriotism and idealism,



and hope for the glorious life of his mother-tongue as a world language. His brilliant speech at the second Oriental Conference at Calcutta was highly appreciated and widely read. He was appointed a Member of a small Committee to report on the present and future working of the Bangalore Institute of Science. His address at Bangalore was also remarkable and attracted considerable attention and admiration. We leave to his biographer, to delineate in detail, the great part he played in and his labours in connection with, the Calcutta University Commission.

There was a hue and cry in Anglo Indian Papers over his inclusion in the Commission for it was maintained that Asutosh was called upon to sit in judgment upon his own actions and on the working of his own plans and policies in the University. But he became a great friend of his colleagues and the President Dr. Sadler became one of his most ardent admirers. And he toured throughout the length and breadth of the vast country visiting along with his colleagues all the centres of learning; naturally enough he was the most important figure—though not the most imposing one, for he travelled in pure Dhuti—and the dominant personality of the Commission. In his simple and ordinary national dress he made all the greater impression on the public mind and commanded their spontaneous esteem. And it is no disparagement to his learned and eminent colleagues on the Commission to say



that it is no little due to his commanding personality and his unique knowledge of the conditions of academic life and working of the Indian Universities, that the Report of the Commission is the most honest, elaborate, straightforward and constructive. Thanks to the anomalous law of the land, Asutosh would have retired from the Bench—a famous jurist and brilliant Judge, nothing more; but some time before his final retirement, the permanent Chief Justice—Sir Lancelot Sanderson—took six months' leave, and it fell to his lot, as the senior-most Judge, to preside for the short period, over the High Court which he adorned so long. He retired from the Bench a few months before he was actually due to, in order to take up an important case on behalf of the Maharaja of Dumraon at the Patna High Court. The late Mr. C. R. Das was originally briefed for the Maharaja; but as he clung to the Non-co-operation movement, the services of Asutosh was requisitioned by the Maharaja. The case was heard by a special Bench presided over by the Hon'ble the Chief Justice, Sir Dawson Miller, who was greatly attracted to, and became a warm admirer of, Asutosh. The case was drawing to a close and Asutosh had wellnigh finished his argument, when he was attacked with a terrible and fatal disease which went from bad to worse with the lightning rapidity and his condition was declared hopeless before the news of his illness spread abroad; and even before his wife and sons



and doctors could arrive from Calcutta and elsewhere, the curtain was finally wrung down upon the drama of his meteoric career, the icy hand of the eternal, irresistible, invisible Angel was upon him and swiftly—too swiftly—was he translated to the unknown and unknowable region which is the ultimate and eternal home of us all. Three days before, Asutosh was, practically speaking, the healthiest and stoutest of men; no one could detect in him the slightest trace of illness—not to speak of the shadow of death!

Apart from the terrible suddenness, and tremendous nature of the national calamity, Asutosh's death has another tragic aspect and a quite different significance about it. Asutosh liked to live in the midst of his wife and children, friends and relatives; even in the course of his protracted travels, he was always accompanied by his sons and his bosom friends, at least, by one of them. What a grim irony of fate it was that such an affectionate father, such a dear friend, such a loving husband would be cut off from the intimate circle of his near and dear ones when he was face to face with the Angel of death—when he finally took leave of this old familiar, mortal world of ours. And the end came all too suddenly; on the eve of the fatal illness, he actually took his dinner at the place of his chauffeur. On Friday 23th May (1924) the news spread that he was indisposed—he did not, consequently, leave Patna to spend,



as usual, a day in Calcutta; on Saturday, doctors from Calcutta, were called; on Sunday afternoon, his eldest son—the only one who was present—asked his mother, by wire, to come up; she was at Calcutta attending his youngest son who had been seriously ill; she started for Patna by the evening train, but it was now all over with her illustrious husband; the news reached Calcutta after her departure; Mr. Justice P. R. Das wired from Patna station to most of the stations between Patna and Calcutta that the mortal remains of Sir Asutosh were being conveyed in a special train to Calcutta and Lady Mookerjee was also coming by the Punjab Mail; Mr. Justice Das asked the Railway people to see that Lady Mookerjee was taken down from the train without the terrible news being broken to her; and at Jhajha she was made to leave the Mail and entrain the special.

We need not dwell any more on this painful and tragic aspect of the dramatic end of the “most powerful public character,” the most prominent figure in the public life of the country. He in His infinite wisdom, knows what purpose He served by this great tragedy grimly enacted! But to us poor feeble and frail mortals, this awful domestic and national calamity, this sudden death of one of the most illustrious Indians, the demise of Bengal's greatest man of action—specially as it happened at Patna, far away from his own hearth and home, in the



neighbouring province—must not lose its significance. Patna, sanctified as it is with the memories of the departed glories of Magadha, of its splendid city—Pataliputra—and of Asoka—Patna—though it is the present capital of a newly-created province—will always kindle many sacred recollections and touch many tender chords in every Bengali heart. Patna which witnessed the passing away of one of the greatest sons of Bengal, and of India, for the matter of that, will be a new place of pilgrimage to the generations to come, reminding them of its last association with the Bengal's hero of action; much as he loved his Bengal and his India, let his death at Patna, away from his own kith and kin, sound a death-knell to narrow provincialism and false patriotism; let Patna remind us that India is not a geographical expression—divided into watertight Provinces and Presidencies; it is the home—the common mother—the sacred mother land—of us all.

Twenty fifth of May 1924 is a memorable day in the history of Bengal of today; for it witnessed an event of outstanding importance and extraordinary significance to the people of Bengal, nay of all India—the death of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee; the annals of Calcutta, also, has few dates so much memorable as the twenty sixth—the day following. It was in the morning of this fateful day that the immense city was electrified, as it were, all on a sudden; and the citizens, all over the city,



in the suburbs, and beyond the Hooghly, were simply astounded, when as usual, they opened the morning papers; they were struck dumb; they almost staggered, they could scarcely believe their own eyes; but it was there—the tragic truth, Sir Asutosh was no more. The news spread like wild fire that Asutosh Mookerjee, the Bengal Tiger, the idol of young Bengal, the most versatile personality, the most complex and powerful public character in India was, no longer in the land of the living; coming as it did close upon the death of Sir Asutosh Choudhuri, the shock was as intense as it was sudden. How extraordinary must be the personal magnetism, how wonderful, his hold over myriads of his fellowmen, how brilliant the worth and achievements of the man, who could attract such a huge and heterogeneous crowd that swelled his funeral procession—a crowd representative of every shade of interest and opinion! * The solemn

* Great as Asutosh was in life, he was perhaps greater in death; for, in presence of Death—the voice of controversy hushed into silence—and he received an ovation, far greater than any he received in life; the whole Calcutta was stirred to the utmost—Calcutta never was stirred so much except on Mr. Das's death; and the whole Calcutta poured out to greet the mighty dead—The Hon'ble Minister of Education and Hon'ble Judges of High Court, Members of Legislative Council and advocates, prominent leaders of public opinion and of aristocracy, Aldermen and councillors, Chief Executive and other Officers of Calcutta Corporation mustered strong at the Howrah Station to pay their respect; when the vast procession reached the University which he left, renovated and rejuvenated, as the standing



spectacle of so vast a gathering of mourners—all of whom felt a keen personal loss was touching to the extreme and different from the many spectacular sights and processions Calcutta has been generally accustomed to. And the whole country began to be ringing with feeling references and tributes to, and profound eulogies of, the various aspects of his character and life-work. Indeed so spontaneous an out-burst of nation-wide grief and public lamentations has few parallels in recent times in India.

But inscrutable are the ways of Providence !* To quote the greatest Bengali poet, the man who has come to the end of his span of life is smitten by a

monument of his lifelong labours and sacrifices, the scene begged discription. And with setting of the sun in the western horizon, the mortal remains of Bengal's most majestic and mighty son were reduced to ashes.

* The tragedy of his death is really unrelieved by any redeeming feature—unless it is the contemplation that if he did not die full of years, at least he died full of honours ; and seldom were men honoured so much ; never were honours more deserved. At the hands of the Government who had no more formidable antagonist or critic, he received the title of C. S. I. and Knighthood; the University of Calcutta conferred upon him the Honorary Degree of D. Sc. and PH. D. and as we have said, various other Universities such as, of Mysore, Lucknow, Allahabad, Lahore, Benares invited him to deliver Inaugural or Convocation Address. After the expiry of his protracted Vice-Chancellorship in 1914 his marble bust was placed at the most prominent place facing the grand staircase of the Darvanga Library Buildings: it was unveiled by Lord Curmaichael in presence of the flower of the intellect and elite of the country ; on every anniversary of his death his bust is literally



serpent from under the earth. Such was the case with Asutosh. He was looking forward to a period of rest and retirement—of course not completely free from the thousand and one cares and worries of public life; many of his anxious and admiring countrymen were eagerly expecting a definite lead from him in many burning questions of the day, in matters of vital importance to the national life; most of them hoped that he would enter the political arena and would be in forefront of the freedom movement, if not immediately at the head of a prominent political party to fight the country's, battle on the floor of the legislature or on the inner council-boards of the Government; no one could imagine for a moment that he was really on the brink of grave, when he left Calcutta for Patna seven days before his death, hale and hearty strong and active, to all human appearance. But the fates decided otherwise and he was snatched

covered with flowers and wreaths; in laying the wreath on the first occasion, Sir Ewert Greaves said in a pathetic strain, "The flowers will fall and fade and die and we who stand here will pass away but his fame and his memory will remain." But perhaps the most striking tribute and spontaneous homage that fell to his lot was the presentation of the Silver Jubilee Commemoration Volumes (numbering 3) containing a large number of essays and articles by numerous scholars and savants, scientists and men of letters, Indian and European. These volumes were presented to him by some of his admirers headed by Dr. Stephen, on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of his attaining the Degree of Doctor of Law of the Calcutta University. "These Silver Jubilee volumes will consequently constitute a unique collection of contributions to learning by members of the University", declared Lord Ronaldshay.



away from our midst, cut off apparently in the exuberance of strength and energy, if not of health and vitality, leaving a deep and dismal void in the public life and in the ranks of his country's workers and fighters—a void not to be filled by another man of his generation ; who knows, when if ever, will come the blessed soul who will truly replace him ! But perhaps it is too much so hope for one, will really replace him ; for he belonged to a class ; to a kingdom by himself. And as Emerson says, "when nature removes a great man, people explore the horizon for a successor ; but none comes ; and none will. His class is extinguished with him. In some other and quite different field the next man will appear."



CHAPTER V.

The Man—A Closer View.

His filial affection—Remarriage of his widowed daughter, its significance—His devotion to his parents—His favourite delicacy, time honoured way of 'keeping' invitations—The simplicity of his dress, at home and abroad—His eagerness to attend social functions—Enthusiasm for historic places—His accessibility, and amiability, frankness and affableness—His open mind—The humane and emotional side of his nature; its warmth and sympathy—His keen interest in the affairs of his friends and acquaintances—His encouragement and inducement to promising scholars and scientists—His manly stand by a distant school against the wrath of the Government.

The life that Asutosh, lived in his family and society—unlike his strenuous public life—was simple, quiet and almost always, sweet and serene. His greatest opponents, his bitterest critics or his worst enemies could not bring a serious charge against the man in his private life. Few parents could love their children so silently, so devotedly and so steadfastly in the midst of a variety of stupendous works and ceaseless labours; fewer still could gather up their strength and summon their courage to act up to the intense love, such as was his and could do what he did, not only with a view to uphold and carry out what, in his mind, was right in the abstract, but with the noble object of overcoming the misfortune and of bettering the lot of his daughter. And he did not seem



to care a straw for, and was not at all moved from the path of duty (as he conceived it) by the ridicule, the scorn, the abuse and anger of the multitude and what was more, by the social ostracism, that he was subjected to ; no greater proof of one's love for his children—few, very few instances of more heroic sacrifice and suffering—could be given than the one that Asutosh gave in remarrying his dear tender-aged daughter widowed in her teens. Asutosh was an orthodox Hindu, a Hindu of Hindus ; he observed strictly the rites and rituals of his religious faith and the time-honoured customs and usages of the Hindus ; he upheld all the traditions of his caste and his race and performed all the duties enjoined by the 'sastras' so far as humanly possible in the peculiar circumstances of his crowded life. For him to ride rough shod over the popular sentiment and set at defiance the opinion and injunctions of the orthodox society of which he himself was a prominent member, and to court all the wild exuberance of anger and abuse, wrath and derision of the society he was born and bred up in—the society he loved much at heart—and lastly to estrange quite a large number of his countrymen and all these, to do what he considered to be his duty—was an act worthy of the man, of the great man that he was. Apart from the abstract righteousness of the act, few outside the orthodox Hindu Society, will realize what it really amounted to.

He had not only to reckon with the opposition and anger of the pillars and supporters of that



society who are as vigilant and as inexorable as the stern unrelenting Nemesis, in guarding its worn-out customs and practices, its old prejudices, and false notions, and in punishing those who disregard its laws and traditions; he had also to meet and overcome the reluctance and superstitions—the fears and tears—of those that were really dear and near to him. Overflowing with affection for his beloved children, he did all these, he courted all these, he staked even his own popularity, to perform what he conceived to be his duty towards his poor little daughter, widowed soon after her marriage. This one supreme act of his life at once raises him to a far higher plane than most of his fellow-creatures and entitles him to rank as a great practical social reformer; in fact, this one act has advanced the cause of social reform—the widow remarriage, in particular—more than a hundred public meetings and conferences could have done. There are few Hindu homes in Bengal and elsewhere, which are not darkened by the shadow of suffering widowhood. Thanks to the pernicious customs of early marriage, there are in our midst, hundreds and thousands of girlwidows rotting and dragging their melancholy existence from day to day, from year to year, an existence the unrelieved monotony of which is, in many cases, equalled only by its continued hardship and forced privations. But few people seriously consider, their mute sufferings, and their golden hopes and glowing ideals, unrealized but healthy in themselves,



fewer still try to brighten the futures of the poor widowed girls, that are thwarted by an old and arbitrary custom. The age-long submission to this monstrous custom has blunted our feelings and our good sense ; hence to try to relieve his dear daughter from the iron grip of this social monstrosity, to remarry her in the face of social ostracism, speaks volumes of Asutosh's extraordinary moral courage and his uncommon courage of conviction as well as his sense of duty to, and unbounded love for, his children. It is a thousand pities that the remarriage of his widowed daughter proved as unhappy as the former one—her second husband dying soon ; so her daughter was again widowed ! what an irony of Fate it really was ! what a sad reward of his unique manliness and love for his children ! but this does not in the least take away from the intrinsic moral excellence of his action but enhances the glory of the man. In the desolation of the unexpected, illmerited calamity, deprived of the satisfaction of the fulfilment of his immediate object, Asutosh stood firm and erect as a rock ; if there are any failures more glorious than success—speaking in the restricted and limited sense, for nothing under the sun is absolute failure or is unwarranted—it was his ; and his misfortune, the frustration of his dearest object under the inscrutable decrees of Fate, clothed the man with a supreme glory and this act of his shines today in superb grandeur. And when towards the end of his life, the misery and misfortune of his



dear daughter, borne with singular heroism, were put an end to by the merciful Heaven. Who took her away to Himself, Asutosh was almost prostrate with grief and sorrow—though very few people have seen him give expression to his mental agony and sufferings, as most men do. The fact was, he was never able to recover from the shock—the blow was too much for him even. At the sacred Temple of Jagan-nath at Puri, he shed silent tears in the presence of the mute deity, as the recollections of his dear, departed daughter came rushing in upon his mind. To honour, if not to perpetuate her memory, Asutosh handed a sum of Rs. 40,000 over to the University, to institute a course of lectures in the name of his departed daughter.

This rare and unbounded love of his nature was not confined to his widowed daughter; nor even to his children alone, but it flowed to all his relatives and dependents in whose midst he delighted to pass his days. He was equally devoted to his parents and his friends and all those who were fortunate enough to be under his fostering care and protection. In his early years, during the life-time of his good-natured and loving parents, there was no more dutiful, no more obedient son in Bengal; the brilliance of his academic career, the phenomenal success that greeted him in after life, the unique fame and glory that fell to his lot, failed to dim the lustre of his love and devotion to his parents.



One anecdote, oft quoted as it is, will not be out of place here. As is well-known, Lord Curzon—a keen judge of men and things he was—was profoundly impressed by the intellectual powers and sterling character of Asutosh. This brilliant Viceroy, who suffered nothing to stand in his way, wanted Asutosh to go over to Europe so that the Europeans might see for themselves what English education was capable of accomplishing in an Indian. But Asutosh bluntly refused to avail himself of what was really a golden opportunity of winning fame and glory in foreign lands—just as he had refused the offer of Government service early in his life—on the ground that his mother strongly objected to his crossing the seas to go over to Europe. He was then taken to the august presence of the Viceroy who himself repeated the offer and expressed his personal desire to see him proceed Home; but, as Asutosh, again declined the offer on the ground of his mother's objection, His Lordship said, "Then tell your mother, that the Viceroy and Governor-General of India commands her son to go"; whereupon Asutosh readily replied, "Then I tell the Viceroy of India, that the mother of Asutosh Mookerjee refuses to let her son be commanded by any body excepting herself, be he the Viceroy of India, or be he any one higher." No doubt, both Lord Curzon and Asutosh were half in just and half in earnest, but the fact remains that Asutosh never disregarded his mother's behest by visiting Europe.



It is no use multiplying instances ; truth was that the warmth of his affection and sympathy, the intensity of his love and devotion were only equalled by the depth and range of his intellectual powers. There are hundreds of learned men and brilliant graduates of the Calcutta University who are under direct obligation to him ; and the number of men, young and old, rich and poor, high and low, that have been befriended or benefitted by him, in some way or other, is a legion. Thus in private life, he was kind and nice not only to those that were dear and near to him but to a very large circle of friends and acquaintances. We can not, however, leave this serene, simple aspect of his life—the life of the man as he lived in his society and in the inner circle of his friends and his family—without having a few glances at it. The most striking and outstanding fact of this side of his life was the unique emotionalism and simplicity of his nature ; it is seldom that emotion, will and intellect develop side by side and develop harmoniously ; it is very, very seldom that we come across an intellectual giant with an intensely emotional and active nature ; but Asutosh was not merely such an intellectual giant of the first water ; few men are blessed with so great, so large a feeling heart, with so lofty an emotional nature, as were Asutosh's and this remarkable emotionalism of his nature, this responsive and sympathetic heart was the key to his whole being—it made him the most devoted husband, the most



affectionate father, the most loving and faithful friend and a most soft-hearted, easily accessible and amiable man to his fellowmen.

Asutosh loved to live the simple, patriarchal life of the head of a Hindu family, surrounded by his friends and his relations, his children and his dependents. He was a Bengali Brahmin and he retained, through life, an ancient Brahmin's simplicity of manners, simplicity of dress and simplicity of diet; he had even a Brahmin's proverbial love and longing for rich and delicious food, for tempting sweets for the nice looking, harmless and wholesome সন্দেশ 'Sandesh', which might justly be called the prince of sweets and which has peculiar attraction for, and significance to, the Bengali tongue; he was a vegetarian for, by far, the greater part of his active life and good 'Sandesh'—সন্দেশ specially from the well known Bhim Nag's*—was his favourite delicacy and he could and would eat quite a decent number and quantity. It has become a fashion in the aristocratic and higher Bengali circle in Calcutta not to wait for, or sit to, dinner but to keep an invitation by mere presence; but Asutosh—so long as his health permitted—was the exception to the general rule; he would

* It is almost a truism to say that that Bhim Nag is the prince of Indian confectioners—Bhim Nag's Sandesh is a household word throughout Bengal. His wellknown shop in Wellington Street enjoyed the uniform patronage of Asutosh who would never fail to stop his carriage or his car in front of the shop to buy his sweets.



not only make it a point to dine and dine, with pleasure and enthusiasm, at a friend's or relative's or acquaintance's but would also, on some occasion, take with him a quantity of sweets, according to time-honoured custom among the professional Brahmins. Just three days before his death at Patna, he took a sumptuous dinner at the house of his chauffeur and this one instance at once shows the man in his true colours and throws a flood of light upon this side of his nature.

In dress and manners, Asutosh was a Bengali of Bengalis; never in his life did he appear in other than his simple native costume—in coga and chapkan or in his dhuti and China coat; it fell to his lot to deal with the highest in the land and even the mightiest under the sun; whether welcoming His Majesty the King Emperor or His representative in India, whether on the Bench of, and presiding over, the highest Court of the country, or in the presidential chair of our greatest University, and whether in a great Imperial Darbar or on an important Commission, he was always in his old familiar native costume; it is a well-known fact and we have already referred to it—but it will bear repetition that he travelled through the length and breadth of India, along with Dr. Sadlar and his European colleagues, in pure and simple Dhuti. A very interesting and amusing story is related by one of his most intimate friend—Mr. Hemendranath Sen, Vakil, Calcutta High Court—about the ultra simplicity of his



dress. Asutosh was, at that time, at Delhi along with Mr. Sen and other notables, in connection with the Darbar in 1911; Mr. Sen had a night gown with him, which fitted him (Asutosh) very well; one morning Asutosh put that gown on and proceeded on his walk; his friend remonstrated that in that gown he would make themselves a laughing stock of strangers as well as of friends. Asutosh said he did not care what other people said or thought of him; it was only characteristic of the man; but the expected happened; Asutosh met his old friend Gokhale; the two friends—the old colleagues in Imperial Council—exchanged many words; and the conversation over Mr. Gokhale, mildly took Mr. Sen to his task and said, “Well, Hem Babu! you are keeping his company—is it proper to let Asu Babu stir out of his house, in this dress?” On another occasion—and it was a very important occasion—Asutosh did not leave his habitual national dress under peculiar circumstances the force of which would have bent any other individual’s tenacity, if for once. He was in Mysore, as the guest of His Highness the Maharaja who invited him to deliver the first Convocation Address of the Mysore University. His Highness the Maharaja desired to entertain Sir Asutosh at a party, invitations to which were every select and special court dress was prescribed for the occasion, in accordance with the time-honoured custom of the Mysore Darbar. And Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee, one of the first Professors of Mysore University, says of the Mysore Court



as 'the citadel of conventions and formalities,' "But Sir Asutosh" let as quote from Dr. Mukerjea, "won't hear of any formalities ; his own national dress claimed his supreme allegiance and he was not prepared to accept other dress, even if it was the passport to highest honour and dignity....The prince of Mysore...grasped and saved the situation by laying courtly etiquette aside and permitting full liberty to Sir Asutosh in respect of an important convention of the Darbar..... the moral force of an individual stood successfully against long history...".

It is no doubt true that there have been Indians in the service of the Government who, though they have risen in the estimation of their fellow-men or have acquired real pre-eminence in the public life of the country, have always respected their national dress—Sir Guroodas Banerjea, Sir Surendra Nath Banerjea, Drs. P. C. Roy and Tagore and others; nor is it in itself a sin to appear in European costume. But there is, all the same, a peculiar and rare grandeur in obstinately preferring one's own national or traditional dress and no one can claim a greater share of the grandeur than Asutosh; not only did he receive the highest official, the head of the Government in India, in his own dress ; but he would persist in going to them at their luxurious and exclusive quarters in his country's dress ; Pandit Issur Chandra Vidyasagor of revered memory, was the one Indian of the last century who would go to the Government House at Calcutta in coarse Dhuti and Chadar ; And when Asutosh would go

to the Government House at Darjeeling in his old familiar Dhuti—it was a sight to see and it actually drew quite a large number of men—a peculiar sight it really was. A Bengalee Brahmin as he was to the core, Asutosh would sit at his house in the morning—wearing a ‘gengi’ or without anything at all, and he used to see all his visitors, high or low, rich or poor, European or Indian, in that fashion. One day Mr. Hornell, Director of Public Instruction, came to see him; Asutosh tried to put on a ‘genji’ before Mr. Hornell stepped into his room; without wearing it, he said, ‘No, I won’t put it on, let me see Hornell as I am;’ then he came forward and greeted the high official, ‘Come in, Hornell,’ and both Mr. Hornell and Asutosh were then quite at home!

His multifarious activities, his varied and complex intellectual labours and physical strain notwithstanding, Asutosh found it possible to accept invitations to numerous social and dinner parties and accepted them with alacrity; he was not too high for any one and even his motor driver could claim him as his guest and treat him to a dinner; indeed it was a real marvel—nay an unfathomable mystery—as to how he could find time to attend these various social functions, buried as he was in his works, his thoughts and his books. His sudden and unexpected visit to Berhampur on the occasion of the celebration of the jubilee of Rai Baikantha Nath Sen Bahadur under the presidency of the Maharaja Sir Manindra Chandra Nandi is a typical instance; Baikantha



Babu was the elder brother of his intimate and bosom friend—Babu Hemendra Nath Sen ; on receipt of this news, Asutosh hastened to his friend's at 8 P. M. in the evening after finishing his day's labours in the University. He mildly reproved Hem Babu for neglecting to let him know of his brother's Jubilee. "You have at hand" replied Hem Babu, "thousand and one works ; how can you go to Berhampur, leaving all these here ;" "Well" retorted Asutosh, "how will your elder brother take it, if I do not go"; any further argument was useless and it was settled that he would go, and he went there and joined in the jubilee celebrations ; Baikantha Babu was beside himself with joy and the whole of Berhampur felt thrice blessed.

The greatest man of action as he was, Asutosh was a very energetic and enthusiastic traveller and tourist ; he would spend much of his valuable time and energy in visiting historic places, places of a natural beauty and interest ; his companions and fellow travellers—people who could not even approach him in the volume, variety and complexity of his stupendous labours—found their energy and enthusiasm flagging but Asutosh, never. Either at Bangalore or Benaras, Mysore, or Lahore, Asutosh would make it a point to pay his visit to, and minutely observe, the places of interest ; as a member of the University Commission, or on the occasion of Delhi Darbar—no matter whatever circumstances it might be—he must snatch many hours from his crowded engagements and the ordinary routine of



his official work for the purpose of visiting the places which have attractions for the tourists. Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjea thus relates his second visit to Mysore "His Mysore hosts had to arrange for him days overcrowded with engagements to which he was more than equal; some of these included his visits to many historic places. I was deputed by the Mysore Palace authorities to receive him in the early hours of a winter morning at the station of Seringapatam in response to his desire that he should first visit that historic place as a gateway to Mysore. Some of his colleagues of the (University) Commission did not feel themselves equal to the task and were less interested in antiquities than in their health and comforts. But Sir Asutosh represented a different type of culture; he felt he could not pass by Seringapatam associated with the memory of Hyder Ali and Tipu.... It must be said to his credit that Sir Mickael Sadlar caught the spirit and enthusiasm of Sir Asutosh, and at 4 A. M. in winter the two old gentlemen with the enthusiasm and energy of youth, had to be conducted to all the historic monuments of the locality with the strain it ment on their physical powers after long railway journeys continued for days....."

No other man of such influence and status in Bengal could be approached so easily, and so quickly as Asutosh; he was the one big man in Calcutta who was as accessible to a peasant as to a prince; and his house was regularly beseiged—and quite thoroughly too—by an everflowing stream of visitors—by a



heterogeneous crowd—by people of all shades of opinion and interest, by all sorts and conditions of men, and no one went back without having had their say or failing to see him or rousing his interest and his sympathy; every one was sure of his help or advice as it was the easiest thing in the world to reach an appeal to his heart. No other man of our part, of the country—except Vidyasagar—had such a unique glory of being the friend, philosopher and guide to such a large number and variety of people, young and old, rich and poor, humble or exalted. Speaking of his impression of his first visit to Sir Asutosh's H. E. Sir John Kerr said, on the occasion of opening the Asutosh Buildings of the University, "I well remember the Sunday morning in July just thirteen years ago, on which I first visited Sir Asutosh Mookerjee at his residence at Russa Road. I shall never forget my first view of the courtyard and ante-rooms, crowded like those of a Consul of ancient Rome, with all sorts and conditions of men, with Maharaja, pandits, business men, lawyers and humbler folks who had come there to seek advice and help from that man of stout heart and capacious brain."

No proper estimate of the character and personality of a great man, nor a just appreciation of his greatness, is possible except through a closer view of the man as he lives his daily life in his family and society; for, here in his domestic and social circles, he is without his official or professional mask or the cloak of his public life; here in this inner circle he is laid



bare in all his weaknesses and his greatness, and most of the criticism and estimate of Asutosh (the prominent and complex public character) from unsympathetic quarters suffer from this serious defect that these do not touch a fringe of the real worth and rare greatness of the man; for if the pre-eminence of Asutosh in the public life of his country rested upon his intellect and his industry, the secret of his abiding greatness as a man lay in his all-embracing sympathy and his profound emotionalism, the frankness and simplicity, the warmth and generosity of his nature; so it is impossible to have a fuller, truer and closer view of the man—of the real man that lived in the intellectual giant and the indomitable and peerless public character—through his active, public life, his public acts and speeches. One has got to come to close quarters; and this closer view of the man is remarkable to a degree; it is eloquent; it is an agreeable surprise—it was so to many men of light and leading, not to speak of the needy and poor. Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal had no personal acquaintance with Asutosh until quite lately; one morning he had occasion to go to him at his house on some business and he found, as usual, many people waiting for Sir Asutosh—he was engaged in some work in connection with the University Commission; a little afterwards, Asutosh came down and finding him waiting, welcomed him in a very familiar way—as if he was an old acquaintance or an old friend; and how frank and affable



he was to Bipin Babu—as to all others—let him speak; “Well, Bipin Babu,” said Asutosh, “you have come at such a time that I can, give myself the pleasure of a talk with you at leisure; please come here some evening, we will have a long talk.” As Mr. Pal came out of the room, Asutosh also came along with him to the corridor and addressed him thus:—“Bipin Babu, don’t you think that they have more confidence in me than you have; it was only the other day that I went to Mysore in connection with the Mysore University; C. I. D. followed me; do not think, you alone have this honour; I am also honoured in this way. I regret I can not speak much to you today, much as I wish to. Please come another day in the evening. I knew my Mysore speech would not be liked by the authorities; but then what can not said in British India, can be said in Native States; please read my Mysore speech; I had no mask on, and I spoke quite heartily.” Mr. Hemendra Nath Ghosh, Editor, ‘Basumati’ had also similar experience in the course of his visit interview; it happened in the University where Dr. Brajendra Nath Seal was delivering a lecture under the presidency of Asutosh; finishing his presidential task, Asutosh went into the Vice-Chancellor’s room, calling in a friend of Mr. Ghosh, as he caught sight of him; Mr. Ghosh had consequently, to wait outside. But as Mr. Ghosh’s friend was trying to take leave of Asutosh quickly, the latter asked the reason and was told that Mr. Ghosh was waiting for him;



"Please call him here" said Asutosh, "will he lose his caste if he comes here?" Mr. Ghosh stepped inside, and was asked to take his seat. "You chose not to come to me" said Asutosh, "for you—an extremist—think, I am but a Government servant; so a sycophant. But the Government think that there is no greater extremist than I am; but my plan and course of action are a little different. I want to pay them back in their own coin, frustrating their object with their own weapon"

So we find that the closer view of the man reveals the loving father, the faithful friend, the loving head of a family and the child of his society, true to itself; it gives us a glimpse of his generous, sympathetic and responsive heart—one that was quite in unison with his time and country; it even, enables us to understand the innate and profound emotionalism of this nature. How deep was his affection for his children, how strong was his attachment to his friends may be judged by the fact that he seldom stirred out of Calcutta without any one of the former or of the latter. Either in his protracted tours through the length and breadth of India as a member of Sadlar Commission, or on the occasion of his visit to Mysore or Lahore, he was invariably accompanied by one of them; the fact was he could not long stand their absence; it was only too well-known how he would be moved at their illness; during the last few months of his life—which he passed at Patna on a professional call—his youngest son was



seriously ill, he was thoroughly overwhelmed with anxiety and worry and in spite of a week's heavy intellectual labour and physical strain, he would come down to Calcutta every Saturday pass a day or a half and again go back; indeed people were surprised to see him so much beside himself with anxiety and suspense; as we have already said the heavy bereavement that fell to his lot towards the close of his life—the death of his dear daughter—was too much for him and he was even seen to shed tears. This anxiety and worry, this suspense and grief, were not confined to his own children or to his own kith and kin but they spread to all his friends and relatives as well as their children. Not only this: he would not only be sorry in their sorrow; but no one could be more glad or happy at their joys and pleasures, the enthusiasm with which he could dine at his friends' or treat them to dinner was also striking. And the alacrity with which he hastened to Berhampur on the occasion of the jubilee of his friend's brother—Rai Bahadur Baikuntha Nath Sen—speaks volumes of the warmth of his attachment. He had few, if any, secrets; with his intimate friends and associates, he would discuss his plans and schemes, exchange his ideas and his thoughts, express his fears and his hopes, and share his joys and his sorrows—in a manner which is reminiscent of childhood; when the personnel of the Post-Graduate Reorganization Committee was announced, he called his intimate



friend—Hemendra Sen—to his chamber at the High Court at the time of tiffin and expressed his deep concern and misgivings as the proportion of Indian, to the European, members, was two to one; and some time afterwards, he again called his friend at that hour and at that place; he was in very joyful mood; he offered his friend the *सन्देश* 'Sandesh' which he was taking and told him, quite beaming with joy and delight, that the report was signed and it was unanimous.

Apart from this simplicity and frankness as well as the warmth of his affection for dear ones and attachment to his friends, the brightest feature of the life he led in his society among his brethren was the humanity and the emotionalism of his strong nature which would assert itself every now and then; indeed the question is an open one as to whether he was greater as a public man, or as an individual member of the society, whether his intellectual eminence or his emotional fervour was on a higher plane; it is well-known that by dint of his intellectual supremacy, his striking bulldog tenacity and perseverance, he towered head and shoulders over his compatriots and his colleagues, but it is not generally known, beyond a very limited circle—and it is a thousand pities—that with a generous and feeling heart he could, he would make the whole world his kin; that the all-embracing sympathy and rare responsiveness of his nature flew to all creatures irrespective of caste, creed and colour. The stern



and uncompromising public man refusing to swerve an inch from his chosen path, or to yield an iota of principle on vital matters, the unrelenting antagonist who would not give any quarters to his powerful and exalted opponent—the redoubtable Bengal Tiger—that loomed large before the public eye, was, at bottom, as soft-hearted as a Bengali girl, as simple and forbearing as a child; in private, Asutosh was known to be broad-minded and open to conviction, charitable and compassionate, ever ready to recognise others' view-point and always full of the milk of human kindness—not only to his followers and friends but even to his many critics and his enemies; it so happened sometimes that his charity and his tenderness were misplaced and he was landed in no little difficulty and trouble, from which it would cost him a good deal to extricate himself.

Eminent European scholars and administrators who had occasion to mix with him, freely testify to his charitable and generous disposition, to his broad-mindedness and his readiness to alter his views in the light of new facts and circumstances. "It is no indiscretion to say" says Sir P. J. Hartog, "that during our deliberations, Sir Asutosh altered almost completely his original views At times it was clear that the differences of individual members could not be thrashed out in the Committee room and on more than one occasion it was my pleasure and privilege to go for a walk with Sir Asutosh, either at the Maidan, or at the hillside at Darjeeling,



and so to arrive at an agreement which had previously seemed impossible." "I well remember" said Sir John Kerr in course of the speech we have quoted from, "my discussion with him, the tenacity and the ability with which he pressed his views and the broad-mindedness with which he saw the case of his opponents." This surely, is a different view of the man who penned the historic letter to Lord Lytton, hurled back the 'insulting offer' of Vice-Chancellorship and stood, uncompromising and unrelenting, firm as a rock, against an avalanche of official opposition and anger and in the midst of most trying domestic misfortune and calamity that fell to his lot; with his towering personality and intellectual ascendancy, his versatility and his varied achievements Asutosh dazzled the world; he was known to it as a hero of action, as a genius in independence and erudition—as a super man in short; but at heart, in reality, he was much more than a mere hero, or a mere reformer, much greater than merely a marvellous man of action and of scholarship; he was a greater man; and those who have had the privilege to claim his intimate acquaintance or his friendship and love, have been more impressed and charmed by the humane side of his nature, than with his intellectual, or active. "My pleasantest recollections of him" says Dr. C. V. Raman, in a very recent article, "refer to the time we worked together on the Pope Committee at Bangalore, in connection with the Indian Institute of Science. We



saw each other then in an atmosphere different from his customary surroundings at Calcutta. He stood higher than ever in my personal estimation as the result of such personal contact."

Thanks to this humane side and emotional fervour of the man, his heart was always full of the milk of human kindness to one and all; his parting words to an Anglo-Indian youth—who was leaving India to prosecute further his studies in the Edinburgh University, speak eloquently of the golden qualities of his heart. "My boy" said he, "I have done all I could for you. Now work hard and return home a great man." Mr. H. C. D'santos, truly writes of this farewell message, "In the friendship of this eminent Indian for a poor Anglo-Indian boy, I saw the possibility and the potentiality of a wider sympathy and better understanding between my depressed community and the larger flourishing communities of India, for the greater good of our motherland." One year it so happened that the Syndicate has finally considered the results of the B. A. Examinations and at their last meeting last word had been said on the subject; Asutosh was having a look through the list of passes and failures; he found that one candidate had failed for only a single mark in Bengalee. "One Bengali student will fail for the want of a single mark in Bengalee!" he exclaimed, "perhaps the hopes of a whole family are centred round him—perhaps a whole family depends



upon him.”* The Head Examiner—Sj. Satish Ch. Bidyavusan—was called with a view to avert the catastrophe and he (the latter) gave the poor candidate one mark more and he was placed in the list of successful candidates. It was only typical of Asutosh and not an isolated incident.

As we have said, the number of people who claimed him as their friend, philosopher and guide, was really legion; nor were they of the same class or status as he was and he had not only a soft corner in his heart for all of them but he always managed—in some mysterious way, perhaps—to keep himself well informed of their troubles and their distress; Sj. Sris Chandra Roy was intimately known to him as a spirited educationist and sincere worker; he used to meet him often; but once on account of the serious illness of his only daughter, this gentleman could not see Asutosh for six months; afterwards when he happened to meet him, Asutosh first of all enquired, “How is your daughter?” there was a ring of sincerity in this loving enquiry, relates Sris Babu and he wondered how could this giant of work—who would always be

* The University (Sadler) Commission says in their Report, “Under the existing conditions in Bengal, the University Degree is the one and only passport to a career to a majority of the students...” Rev. Mr. W. E. S. Holland also declared to the Commission in the course of his evidence, ...“Poverty of the class is the determining factor in higher education. Education is...a family investment to enable the recipient to feed and maintain a crowd of dependent relatives.”



literally overwhelmed with multifarious works—remember the illness of his daughter; but he replied, “How is it that you do not ask as to how, I, an old man, am doing, while you enquire of one you have not seen?” Asutosh said, “Well, don’t you think that I have no information that you brought back your child from the very jaws of death”. It was almost a custom with the Bengali journalists to refer to him in a humorous tone—as the ‘Moustached Minerva’ শূকো সরস্বতী; and it was rather a special privilege of the late famous Bengali journalist, S. Panchkori Banerjee; but Asutosh was not angry with Panchkori Babu for his cheap gibe or ridicule. The above-mentioned Sris Babu composed a little poetical piece on beard; it was appreciated by many; the author wanted to dedicate it to Asutosh and he was on the look-out for an opportunity to have his permission; Asutosh was already informed of this; when they met, Asutosh said, “So you have written a humorous piece on beard” Sris Babu replied, “Yes and it is entitled—শত্রুসংহিতা the hymn of the beard and I want it to be dedicated to the ‘Moustached Minerva;’ Asutosh laughed his charming, touching laugh and said, “Well, the copyright of this title belongs to Panchkori Babu; with his permission you can make use of it in any way; but will he give up his monopoly? and if you use it without his permission and he sues you for infringement of copyright, Mr. Justice Mookerjee will probably give him the decree.” Striking, to a degree, was the keen



personal interest that he took in the business or professional affairs as well as in the domestic life and circumstances of the hundreds of scholars and teachers that were fortunate enough to come in contact or be intimate, with him; and this personal interest in his friends and well-wishers, in his admirers and dependents revealed the inner qualities of his heart—his sympathy and his emotionalism; it also made them feel as it established the fact—that he was but one of them; that however great a scholar or administrator, however eminent a Judge or intellectual giant Asutosh was in his public life, he was not, all the same, above his fellow creatures; he was not too high for his countrymen; he was nothing more or less than a human being just as any one of them. And his keen interest in their affairs was also the secret of the strong love, friendship or attachment which bound hundreds—one might say, thousands—of people of all shades of opinion, of all castes, creeds or colours, to him. "I shall ever remember" says Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjea, "how at the meals at my humble house in Mysore, he made all kinds of searching personal enquiries into the details of my domestic life and circumstances, with his very kind and sympathetic feeling for my old mother who was there on her way to Rameswaram and had prepared some of the sweets for which he expressed an extra relish.....it is these small incidents of domestic life which really forged the links in the chains that bound so many



of us to him in life, and will ever bind to his memory.”

It is but the barest truth and the universal opinion and sentiment of the hundreds of scholars and students, that Dr. Mukherjee gives eloquent expression to; nevertheless, the following telling words of Dr. I. J. S. Taraporewala, Professor of Comparative Philology, (C. U.)—will not be out of place; “Each one of the scores of workers under him he knew thoroughly and strove to know intimately. He knew their affairs and sympathised with their difficulties and always gave help and good sound advice. He knew exactly the ‘soft spot’ in each man’s heart and touched it with a master’s hand. This, above all, was the quality that got him a personal affection such as a leader rarely enjoys. To most of us the gap left by his departure is a gap in our intimate circle which is difficult to fill up, to most of us the memory of Sir Asutosh is bound up with words of kindness, friendly and encouraging letters, a smiling look or an elder brother’s grip of the hand. In short, the feeling that he had the human touch about him, the feeling that he appreciated our joys and sorrows, that is the most precious thing I have in my memory of him.” No wonder, Dr. Taraporewala concludes, “Great as he was as a Lawyer, as a Judge, as a Nation-builder, to me he was greatest as a Man.”

“His sympathy for scholars, enthusiasm for learning and the power to communicate them to all near



him" were what his real greatness rested on ; this was the view of Prof. Radhakishnan ; but these characteristics of his nature and temperament could be far more seen from his dealings with the individual scholars and teachers than from his public acts and speeches, from the life he led in his inner circles than from his public life. Dr. Sunity Kumar Chatterjee who has now acquired a considerable fame in India and elsewhere, for his monumental work—*The Origin and Development of Bengalee Language*—received a good deal of encouragement and inspiration at his hand ; just after he had taken his M. A. Degree, he was appointed by Asutosh to a lecturership. Mr. Chatterjee had, at that time, no little diffidence and misgivings as to his ability to lecture to M. A. students so soon after his passing the same examination ; with this frame of his mind, he went to Asutosh ; the latter—as soon as he was aware of this diffidence—patted him on the back and said, "What is there to be afraid of? You have this much faith in you that what you have read you have read thoroughly and well? Time has now come when you will go on with your studies and advance in knowledge, all your life. Have courage, proceed to your work with a lofty resolution, so that you might brighten the fame and glory of your Alma mater and of your motherland."

Dr. C. V. Raman, the famous Palit Professor of Physics, was a Government servant in the Finance Department, before he was called by Asutosh to one



of the principal Chairs of the University. Mr. Raman -- as he then was—carried on his researches in the laboratory of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science; Asutosh was profoundly impressed with his scholarship and attracted by him and he was anxious and eager to instal him in one of the Chairs—so that he might win for himself as well as for the University the fame and glory that he actually achieved laterly. And it was mainly through Asutosh's advocacy and influence—that he was induced to leave the lucrative Government service which had great future prospects for such talented youths like Mr. Raman. Asutosh asked him why he should rot in the Government service when in the University, he was sure to be an F. R. S.; and he lived to see the fulfilment of his prediction; he had the satisfaction of congratulating Dr. Raman, first of all

One more reference and we have done; his intervention at two crises, on behalf of a remote school at Serajganj, in Eastern Bengal, revealed the stuff he was made of. A high school was started there about 1900 and Sj. Sris Chandra Roy was entrusted with the task of conducting it on safe lines: unfortunately for the infant school, a murder in broad day light was committed within the stone's throw of the school and the responsibility for this dastardly crime was sought to be fastened upon some of its students; but they were ultimately acquitted in the Court of law; the school however, encountered the



wrath of the officials; the Inspector of Rajsahi Division, fortunately, gave his recognition; the Magistrate insisted on this recognition being withdrawn. Finding no way of escape from the official furies and vagaries, Sris Babu threw himself at the mercy of the Syndicate and sought and obtained the protection of Asutosh, then as ever the most prominent member thereof. "We have nothing to do with the Magistrate or the Inspector-General of Police or the Government of Bengal. We are concerned with the Inspector's recommendation; there it is; poor men, they were fighting single-handed. Let the Government fight with the Syndics. It will be a hard nut to break", said Asutosh to Sris Babu, when the latter came to him and the school was recognized. A few years after, came the Partition of Bengal and with it, a wave of intensified patriotic fervour; a national spirit and activities came swept the land; the school and college students took a prominent part in this nation-wide agitation; about 50 students of this school were being prosecuted for some offence or other in this connection. The Government of Sir B. Fuller were bent upon penalising the school for the political activities of its students. Rumour had it that Sir B. Fuller threatened to resign if the school would go scot free. Again the protection of Asutosh was sought and sought successfully. "This is one of the best school of my University" said he, "I can't allow it to be destroyed. He must go...the School can not be closed for the faults of a few



students.... Rest assured.' These words showed the quality of the man!—it was characteristic of him.

It is seldom that we find so pure, so high, so ideal a life, apart from the public activities of a man—specially when he has so brilliant a career. Rather there are numerous instances of eminent men who do rise very high, indeed, achieving a striking success, in the world, but whose inner private lives are not as bright and as unblemished as they ought to be. But Asutosh was the very soul of nobility and purity. There never was a more dutiful son, a more affectionate father, a more devoted friend, a more loving husband and a more amiable, accessible individual member of his community; and in the various walks of life, in the crowded hours of his brilliant career, he came in contact with innumerable men—all sorts and conditions of men—students and teachers, scholars and professors, and others; but in his dealings with them, there was no trace of dishonesty or insincerity; he was simply incapable of these things, his one conspicuous weakness was that he was very fond of his devoted followers and his favourite associates; man he was—nothing more, nothing less, and it is but too much to suggest that he was totally free from some or other of the foibles and idiosyncrasies that flesh is heir to; fondness of his followers might have landed him in various troubles, had he completely played into their hands, but this, he never did; and so he was saved from many a danger and difficulty, because



of his strong and towering personality. He could not have worked so hard and laboured in such strain in the public life of the country—bearing the burden of an Atlas and performing the feats of a Hercules—but for his happy, tranquil and pure private life.

With the exception of the tragedy of his daughter's widowhood and premature death, Asutosh was uniformly happy and fortunate in his wife and children, like his famous father ; like him he, also, gave his four sons the highest education and culture ; and the sons, too, were earnest students and brilliant graduates ; they not only reciprocated his affection but have inherited many of his humane and homely virtues ; his two sons-in-law—one, a rising Vakil and the other, a medical practitioner—as well as his first and second sons—one, a Vakil and the other, a Barrister—are teachers of the Post-Graduate Departments and—with the exception of his second son-in-law—are prominent members of the Senate and the Syndicate. These facts, and the presence of the pious, good-natured and gracious lady as the presiding angel—contributed not a little to the atmosphere of peace and harmony of his home, to which, in days of storm and stress and in hours of worries and trials of his strenuous and protracted public life, he could turn for, from which he received, strength and encouragement, support and solace.



CHAPTER VI.

The Intellectual Giant.

The tendency of the age—Asutosh, a profound student and intellectual giant, his versatile scholarship, vast erudition, and academic degrees—The student is not the man of action, Asutosh, Gladstone, Roosevelt among the exceptions to the general rule—No great original work commensurate with his intellectual powers—Tributes to his rare scholastic and intellectual eminence—His brilliance as a mathematician, his European fame—His greatest work, the paper on Monge's Differential Equation to all Conics—its recognition by pre-eminent scholars in Europe and India—His life-work.

Let us now turn from this almost perfect, homely and quiet side of Asutosh's life to its other aspects. The first thing that strikes even a most superficial observer is his many-sided and protracted activities and sustained labours carried on, on an extraordinary scale. As we have already said, it is, prominently, as a man of action, of solid work, of prolonged intellectual labours—the variety, the intensity and the complexity of which have been hardly equalled by a single individual—it is as an inexhaustible store house of energy and will, that he has fascinated, dazzled and dominated the present generation; no wonder, one of his eminent colleagues on the Bench—Sir George Rankin—said only the other day that the daily outturn of his work was a marvel to others, to one and all. As we have already seen, before he was a High Court Judge, Asutosh was a reputed and versatile scholar, a profound thinker and idealist, an



eloquent speaker and a keen debator, a rising politician and an educationist of the highest order. After his elevation to the Bench, the promising and prosperous lawyer blossomed into a most erudite and independent Judge and a renowned jurist who not only upheld the best traditions of the premier High Court in India, but also shed a lasting lustre upon it. And the University—as it is today—bears the indelible marks of his workmanship and the stamp of his ideal, and represents, in all its expansions and developments, the fruit of his unceasing activities and his strenuous struggle. But before we proceed to deal with his public life—with his more prominent public activities in the judicial or educational line—there is one very important aspect of his eventful life—none too common or general now-a-days—that needs special mention and emphasis. Ours is an age of aggressive materialism when a narrow individualism, if not an utilitarianism, is followed with a vengence and the worship of Mammon is the order of the day and everything is weighed in the balance of £, s. d. The advancement of learning, the progress of science, and the promotion and cultivation of literature and arts are apt to be, and generally are, judged by a commercial standard—thanks to the acuteness of bread problem and of the struggle for existence and the race for glory and prosperity—individual and national—in India and abroad; the intrinsic, abiding and eternal value of learning, of education and



culture, is at a discount. Not only is it a fact that the student, the scholar and the learned do not generally receive their due in many ways; but their path, their labours and their ideals are shunned; and the more profitable avocations more enjoyable parts, more luxurious roles, more comfortable and convenient professions and positions are preferred. Man tends to become a money-making machine, a pleasure-seeking, ease-loving animal; talents hanker after limelight and want to have their worth in gold. In this struggle for existence, for eminence and ascendancy among nations and individuals, the real student—the scholar—is becoming more and more conspicuous by his absence; hence the student in the man of action—as in Asutosh—is brought into prominent relief, and shines in solitary grandeur. In the inner depths of the towering personality and hero of incessant action that he was, in the man of many-sided activities and varied interests, in the prominent public man and complex character, lived the intellectual giant and profound thinker, the eternal student and versatile scholar, the lifelong devotee of Knowledge and seeker of Truth.

As we have seen, Asutosh developed and manifested, quite early, a remarkable taste for study and research and an uncommon capacity for mastering multifarious subjects, literary and scientific. His monumental library at his house,—which contains hundreds and thousands of books and periodicals on all possible subjects and is said to be worth Rs. 5.00.000



—is a standing testimony to this noble but quiet aspect of his life. And the range of his reading, the extent of his studies and the variety of his cultural tastes and interests were greater than almost all other men of his generation. He would as easily make random rambles in Archæology, Experimental Psychology, Comparative Religion and Philology, as in Physics, Geology and other scientific subjects. He would be as much well posted in Economics, Political Philosophy, Railway Finance, Politics, Anthropology, History, Geography, English Literature as in Pali and Sanskrit. He had also a working acquaintance with French, German, Arabic and Persian. He was as much well-versed in the ancient 'sastras,' Philosophical systems, Poetry, Drama, Rhetoric and Grammar of the ancient India as he was familiar with the latest advance and discovery in the scientific world. He was also noted for his profound love of Islamic Culture and Theosophy and was quite at home in Mahomedan Law and Jurisprudence, History and Philosophy. "The thing", writes Dr. I. J. S. Taraporewala, "that struck one most in him was his vast intellect as well as his imagination...There were few subjects taught in this University about which he did not know more than an average professor, while in some subject...his knowledge was profound. The only Boards in the Post-Graduate Department, of which he was not president were those for Latin, and for Hebru and Syriac...but occasionally



he would come out with some suggestion regarding book or some scheme of studies which would set the 'experts' wondering where and how he knew about it." He used to set papers—along with others—for almost all the University examinations; he would also correct or modify the papers prepared by others in such diverse subjects as Mathematics, Physics, Economics, English, Sanskrit, Bengalee, Pali, History, Anthropology Philosophy, etc. He would even adjudge theses submitted for the degrees of Doctors of Science and Philosophy and of Premchand Roychand Studentships—the blue ribbons of the University.

In this connection, we can do no better than quote from the article by the late Mr. A. C. Bose, himself a distinguished mathematician and Controller of Examination (C U.); says Mr. Bose,—"His papers for the Matriculation, the Intermediate and Degree Examinations were models of what such papers should be...He would often take upon himself, in the midst of other pre-occupations, the arduous task of adjudging theses submitted for the degrees of Doctor of Science and Philosophy and the Premchand Roychand Studentship. ...But it was not Mathematics and Science alone that claimed his attention. Sanskrit and other languages, History, Philosophy, Anthropology, Literature, Economics, Ancient Indian History and Culture, and Experimental Psychology engaged his active interest. The writer well remembers occasions when he visited



Sir Asutosh at his house with business of the University ... On one occasion he found him dictating elaborate judicial judgment surrounded by books of legal lore. As soon as he finished these, he took up the University work of a *radically different nature* and soon became absorbed in it. He went through, word by word, a heap of question papers on an infinity of subjects, Mathematics, Physics, English, Sanskrit, Pali, History, Philosophy, Economics, Anthropology etc., modifying, moderating, correcting and putting each paper into a shape suitable for the intending candidates whose best interests he always upheld. And this was done not only in regard to the lower examinations but also in regard to the highest examinations of the University. So rapid and unerring was his decision, so clear and logical was his mind, so great was his erudition, so remarkable was his power of grasping at once the essentials of a case that the writer often felt, ... that here was a man the like of whom he would never see again... Besides, he was the president of various Boards of Higher Studies created laterly."

But the extent and variety and depth of his scholarship and knowledge can be easily judged by a bare perusal of some of his speeches delivered on the Convocations convened specially for the purpose of conferring Honorary Degrees on eminent savants and scholars. In introducing these illustrious men, who have generally made their mark in the republic of science or art, Asutosh would give a lucid account



—and even trace the history—of their works and eminence ; and in so doing, he would manifest his own profound erudition and his deep interests in the subjects in which those scholars brilliantly shone. His Presidential speeches at the Asiatic Society in Bengal are also remarkable—for they reveal his interest and profound knowledge in the various branches of Indology. History and Anthropology, Archæology etc. which form the subjects of special study and research by various scholars ; thus his towering genius, in the words of Dr. Sylvain Levi, ‘could survey the whole range of human sciences.’

It is highly interesting, in this connection, to note the various and numerous titles and degrees that were conferred upon him by his University as well as by the many learned societies, Indian and European. The fact is, such a combination of degrees adorning a single name is unique, to say the least. Besides being Doctor of Law, he was Doctor of Science (D. Sc.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D.) of the Calcutta University. For his deep mathematical researches and knowledge, he was made a Fellow of Royal Asiatic Society of London and at the instance of the famous mathematician Prof. Kayley of Cambridge he was also created a Fellow of Royal Asiatic Society of Edinburgh and was thus, F. R. A. S. and F. R. S. E. as well. Nabadwip Pandit Samaj—the society of the learned of Nabadwip,—the oldest and most highly respected centre of



Sanskrit learning and scholarship in Bengal—conferred on him title of Saraswati—Goddess of Learning and Dacca Saraswat Pandit Samaj—another well-known learned society of Dacca. Second Capital of Bengal,— adorned him with the title of Sastra-bachaspati the master of the 'sastras.' And even the learned followers of Lord Buddha were not behind-hand in honouring one who was deeply learned in their sacred literature and philosophy and gave him the title of 'Sam-buddha-gama-Chakravarti—Master of the Buddhistic lore. It should be recalled in this connection that he was singled out for the unique honour of receiving bare-footed at the hands of Lord Ronaldshay at Government House, Calcutta, the sacred relics of Buddha and he had the privilege of taking them to the Mohabodhi Society at College Square—a unique recognition of his love of the Buddhistic culture and philosophy.

This wide reading and unlimited study made his speeches and Convocation Addresses impressive and instructive and, compared with most of the speeches of the kind, they were revelations. No doubt, his perfect mastery of his language, English and Bengalee his dignified style and polished diction, his ennobling ideas and the force and lucidity of his expression were more innate than acquired; but the catholicity of spirit, constancy to higher principles of life, the breadth of outlook and length of view, clarity of judgment and of perspective, and lastly the loftiness of idealism and



faith which were the characteristic features of his personality and of his speeches and addresses, were due, not a little, to his unlimited reading, his varied study, his great culture, his vast intellect and his rare erudition.

How so great a man of action, one who must devote almost all his waking hours to, who had always to be literally buried in, various complex works, varying from the highest intellectual, to the most humdrum, dry routine labour, one on whose limited time enormous demands were made by many public bodies and institutions—how could such a man give so much time and leisure to reading and studying, is indeed a mystery. Here indeed, is a rarity, a first class paradox, almost a contradiction in human experience and human life, which is seldom to be met with. The student, the scholar, is scarcely the man of action; the idealist is hardly the practical man; more often than not the thinker is not the successful man of the world. But there have been personalities, few and far between no doubt, in whom these palpably contradictory combinations, have taken place. The man who, like Asutosh, reaches the zenith of prosperity and prominence, not by a freak of fortune or chance, but by fighting every inch of his ground, by toiling, struggling, breaking one barrier after another, has to keep his eyes fixed on his goal; he has to be active and alert, he has to give undivided attention to, and keep his energy intact for, the



object he has set his heart upon. He has necessarily to keep the perennial student in himself at a safe distance; he has to give up the luxury of scholarship; he has, often to bid good-bye to the role of the thinker; for too much thinking, too much reading, which, as 'conscience, does make cowards of us all', are not generally accompanied with quickness of decision and promptness of action, not to take into account the enormous inroads they make upon one's limited time and energy. Hence it is that the world has seen comparatively few men who are great alike in the worth, in the volume, and in the variety of work and in the loftiness of idealism, in the wealth of ideas and thoughts and in the range of reading and in the depth of erudition; no wonder the public life of our country tends to be dominated by the noisy and ephemeral and sensational men; the fact is, the world knows very few really great and good men—men who are as much idealists as workers, as much leaders of thought as men of action—men who are ardent students as well as successful men. Nor is this true of our own poor country only—a subject-country as it is. The history of other countries—which are in the vanguard of present-day progress—is not exactly strewn broadcast with instances of this rare phenomenon in human life. The public life of England in the last century, affords an illuminating example of this rarity in the illustrious personality of the late Mr. Gladstone, a name to conjure with. It needs hardly be said that in his own country Mr. Gladstone was



the most prominent political figure of the last century, perhaps the most dominating and powerful personality of his generation. As the veteran leader of the great Liberal party in the hey-day of its glory, as four times Prime Minister of Great Britain at many critical periods in her history, Mr. Gladstone was undoubtedly a most active man of his times—a man, necessarily, of unceasing work. But, like Asutosh's, his life had another—and a very important—aspect, the life of student and the scholar, with an overpowering taste and aptitude for the ecclesiastical and classical literatures. The great authors, the poets and philosophers, of the past, were his constant companions; they supplied the source of his strength, of his sustenance and his solace; in the words of Lord Bryce, "without some such relief, his fury and restless spirit would have worn itself out. He lived two lives—the life of the statesman and the life of the student and he passed swiftly from one to the other, dismissing when he sat down to his books, all the cares of politics."

It can, in like manner, be asserted with equal force, that Asutosh also lived two lives—the life of the student and the life of the many-sided public man and he could as easily pass from the one to the other; he buried himself equally in heaps of books and in volumes of work; if his passion was work and action, his love of literature and science, of history and philosophy knew no bounds.



And the brilliance of his career, the glamour and powers of the highest judicial office that he adorned, the pre-occupations of his public life, his unique position and his personal triumphs, notwithstanding, Asutosh lived a life apart, "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife" away from the noise and bustle of the multitudes and the heat and dust of the business of life, free from the din and clashing of interests in the current controversies—a life in the illuminating realm of his ideas, and in the boundless expanse of his thoughts—in the company of the immortal spirits, the master minds of the world—a life, in the light of his heavenly Ideal!

In the recent reminiscences of Lord Grey the famous Liberal Foreign Minister in Mr. Asquith's cabinet there is a very striking reference to President Roosevelt, which can be applied with equal force to Asutosh; says his Lordship, "The popular impression of Roosevelt conveyed by the Press was, of course, that of a very important and striking personality, but it was, nevertheless, in one respect, very inadequate....He was renowned as a man of action public opinion was fascinated by this quality; and it was not generally recognised that he was also remarkable as a man of reading and knowledge....The student is often a contrast to the man of action; and it is rare to find the two capacities possessed in very high degree and continued in one person. The man of great knowledge is apt to be so balanced in mind as to be sometimes hesitating



in opinion..so perhaps it came to be overlooked that he had great knowledge..". Such was exactly the case with Asutosh; he occupied an enormous space in the active public life of his country; his activities in connection with his University began when he was only 24 and continued without interruption for a generation and a half; his epoch-making achievements in the domain of educational reform—his brilliant record as an independent and fearless judge and a learned and renowned jurist, his indefatigable energy, his force of character and the magnetism of his dynamic personality charmed and dazzled his contemporaries to such an extent that it was well-nigh forgotten that he was a versatile scholar—a man of great cosmopolitan culture and wide reading—an intellectual giant. The bare enumeration of his titles and degrees will give some idea of the extent, variety and depth of his knowledge. The late Pandit Issur Chandra Vidyasagar and the late lamented Lokamanya Tilak were among the few public men and patriots of our country, who were as great in the qualities of their intellectual calibre, of their service and sacrifice on the altar of their motherland, as in the depth of their scholarship and erudition; their literary works which are a standing monument to their learning and their scholarship will proclaim to the posterity what a great genius each of them was. But great as Asutosh was in the massiveness of his intellectual powers, and in the depth and range of his



scholarship and learning, he had to pay the penalty of being, moreover, a great—perhaps too great a—man of action, one who was, to all appearance, in a continuous whirlwind of work and labours. From his very boyhood, Asutosh developed considerable aptitude for original thinking and research—specially a great subtlety in solving intricate mathematical problems and in dealing with mathematical propositions, but unfortunately for the student and the scholar in him, he preferred to devote all his energies and activities to the cause of his University. he did not care to shine in the world of science and letters. “It is a matter of deep regret that in consequence, he has not been able to leave behind, any original work which is commensurate with his massive intellectual powers,” observed a very well-known and respected journal which did not at all spare him in its criticism when he was alive. It is really to be pitied, that barring his learned judgments, most of which are very authoritative and illuminating which in the words of Sir Dawson Miller (Chief Justice, Patna), ‘were masterly expositions of law on every subject with which they deal,’ many of his remarkable addresses and speeches, mainly delivered in the precincts of various Indian Universities, and his early papers and researches in the domain of mathematical science Asutosh could not, rather did not, leave any great original work which might have handed down his name to the unborn generations ; as he himself said in a pathetic



strain in the course of his brilliant Convocation Address in 1914, "to the University concerns, I have sacrificed all chances of study and research." But in spite of the absence of any great original work, commensurate with his versatile genius, his uncommon erudition and his varied and vast learning, his 'massive intellectual powers' did not fail to impress or attract eminent scholars and savants, writers and thinkers belonging to all communities. India has produced, in recent times, greater jurists, greater philosophers greater mathematicians and greater scholars (masters in their own particular department or departments.) But as the veteran editor of 'Modern Review' says in his Bengalee journal, "It is not true to say that the world has really seen any man whose genius is really all-pervading..it is also deviating from bare truth to hold that the modern world can boast of any one who is truly the master of all the sciences. But it is not violating truth to say...that no one in India has been seen to possess the great gift—the supreme gift - by means of which Asutosh carried on, with profound erudition, his complex and multifarious learned labours in so many departments of human activities and thought". Dr. R. Shamasastri also eloquently says, "At once scholar, orator, lawyer, judge educationist, patriot, Sir Asutosh united in himself the qualities which are rarely found in combinations. He had acquired a thorough mastery over many departments of learning. His versatile genius



enabled him to preside over various Boards of Studies in Arts and Sciences and evoked admiration of experts. His brilliant address to the second Oriental Conference... was a masterpiece not likely to be forgotten by those who had the privilege to listen to it." "His genius was all-pervading" wrote Dr. Paranjpye, "and a look at the lists of subjects on which he could speak with authority takes one's breath away. Such an intellectual giant has not been seen in India during the last hundred years." Dr. Sir P. J. Hartog, speaks of him as a man of "vast capacities and encyclopædic learning... yet his mind was open to all ideas from whatever source they came, and few Westerners have had a more catholic mastery of Western thought, and for him thought meant not only contemplation but action." It was really a marvel, a profound mystery—this 'mastery of Western thought'; he never visited Europe; so he had no opportunities of judging—at first hand and in European soil—European society and civilization, the working of various political institutions and social and industrial systems, the many seats of intellectual activities and homes of original thinking, as well as the great thinkers and scientists working in their studies or laboratories—the nerve-centres of European thought and culture. But no one in India—few abroad—possessed a more perfect mastery of the fundamental principles and ideals, the governing ideas and concepts that lie at the root of, and are rock-bottom of, European thought and



culture. And in his public speeches and addresses—in his private talks and discussions—he gave ample evidence of this ‘mastery’ of ‘Western thought’ nay, of ‘the whole range of human sciences’. One more quotation—from that ‘prince of journalists’ Mr. Pat Lovett. “It was universally admitted by friend and foe alike, that he was the dominant giant without compare... The Guzratee saint had not the genius for rule, the vast erudition comprising all the humanities which marked the Bengali jurist and educationist as a man among men... his knowledge of human nature was profound... his driving force was based on a combination of Eastern and Western cultures in which there was ever present an unerring sense of the norm... The Bureaucracy may thank its stars that he gave up to the Calcutta University the genius which could have made India a nation in the true sense of that hard-worked and illused phrase.” And it is admitted that on all hands, had he decided to follow his natural intellectual bend and inclinations, if it had been given to him to answer the call of the scholar and the thinker in him, he might well have extended the bounds of Knowledge and broadened the horizon of Truth. He might have ended his life as one of Carlyle’s heroes as men of letters or of science. Alas ! that was not to be ; who can go against the decrees of Fate!

Mathematics, as is well-known, was Asutosh’s first love ; it is in the domain of the mathematical



study and research, that his genius shone the brightest; it is in the realm of this fascinating and all-embracing science that he won abiding fame and glory in India and in Europe; the little that he left behind in some occasional papers and solutions are really worthy of the highest talents and will, surely, hand down his name to posterity as a foremost mathematician of his time. Along with his aptitude for numerous subjects, literary and scientific, he gave, as we have already seen, unmistakable proof of his extraordinary talent in mathematics—quite early in his boyhood; while yet a school boy he was a member of London Mathematical Association—by dint of the remarkable contributions of his school days; as a Matriculate he began to devote himself to research and had appreciated its value. In those days research was conspicuous by its absence amongst even the advanced and meritorious students. Few among the brilliant graduates took to study and research as a serious occupation; of course there was no such facilities to carry on researches as exist today. And this absence of research work and original thinking and contributions even among the most talented graduates formed the subject-matter of severe criticism at hands of various critics* in connection with the debate in the Imperial Council on the

* Mr. (afterwards, Sir) Alexander Pedler said. —“Have the Indian University Students...shown any aptitude for original research.....”
—Proceedings of the Imperial Legislative Council 1904.



Indian Universities Bill. But Asutosh proved the exception to this general rule, while yet in his school; he sent to England a paper on the 'direct' demonstration of one of Euclid's '*indirectly*' proved proposition and it was published in the 'Messenger of Mathematics.' In 1886 he contributed to the 'Quarterly Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics' a remarkable paper on Elliptic functions. He was of opinion that "the proof of the well-known Addition theorem for the first kind of the Elliptic integrals should follow directly from the *intrinsic* properties of the Ellipse and he showed how this could be very elegantly effected by means of confocal conics. The note closed with an "imaginary transformation" suggested by his investigation. Prof. Arthur Cayley said, as regards this paper, it was remarkable how in the investigation of Asutosh, a real result was obtained by the consideration of an imaginary point.*" In his paper on the Differential Equation of a Trajectory, Asutosh—he had just taken his M. A.—took up the problem of ascertaining the oblique Trajectory of a system of confocal Ellipses which was first solved by Mainardi, the Italian Mathematician. But "Mainardi's solution was so complicated that it was a hopeless task to trace the curve from it; indeed it was so unsymmetrical and inelegant that Professor Forsyth in his Differential Equations did not give the answer." Asutosh arrived at an elegant solution by means of

*Mr. A. C. Bose in the "Calcutta Review."



which "Trajectory was represented by a pair of *remarkably simple equations* which admitted of an interesting geometrical interpretation". Dr. Andrew Forsyth, the world renowned mathematician, quoted Asutosh's solution of Mainardi's problem in his latter edition of Differential Equations. Let us give some of his original Mathematical Papers which had won him fame and admiration at the hands of recognised scientific societies* and learned men all the world over : 1. On a Geometrical Theorem ("Messenger of Mathematics"). 2. Extensions of a Theorem of Salmon's (Ibid). 3. Note on Elliptic Functions which has been referred to in Ennepper's Elliptische Functionen ("Quarterly Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics"). 4. Monge's Differential Equation to all Conics (Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal). 5. Memoir on Plane Analytical Geometry (Ibid). 6. On Poisson's Integral (Ibid). 7. On the Differential Equation of all Parabolas (Ibid). 8. Geometric interpretation of Monge's Differential Equation to all Conics which has been quoted in the famous work—Edward's Differential Calculus (Ibid). 9. On a Curve of Aberrancy (Ibid). 10. Application of Gauss's Theory of Curvature to the Evaluation of Double Integrals. Besides these, he contributed, for years, to the 'Educational Times' of

*For these papers and his mathematical researches he was appointed a Fellow of Royal Society, Edinburgh and a Member of Royal Irish Academy, as also of the Mathematical Societies of London, Edinburgh, Paris, Palermo and New York.



London, his papers and solutions in regard to the outstanding problems set from time to time by eminent Mathematicians of Europe; many of these problems were really so many challenges and remained unsolved for years together; Asutosh's contributions and solutions, in this respect, won him widespread admiration and established his title to be ranked among the foremost mathematicians of his generation. In 1908 he founded the Calcutta Mathematical Society; like the brilliant association of scientists called into being by that illustrious countrymen of ours, Dr. P. C. Roy—the Calcutta School of Chemistry—this society of mathematicians under his fostering care and with the labours of a band of shining scholars brought together by his personality, has been contributing to the progress of higher study and promotion of research in mathematics; it has, moreover, worked its way to a recognised position in the Mathematical world. We are sure we have said enough to show the natural bend of his genius, its intrinsic excellence and the abiding worth of its limited products. "I first heard of him" writes Dr. R. P. Paranjpye, the famous wrangler and public man, "as the author of a book on Geometrical Conics in 1894; and we, students of Mathematics, felt proud of our countryman on reading a reference to him in Edward's Differential Calculus as having found a geometrical interpretation of the complicated differential equation of the fifth order of the general



Conic. If Sir Asutosh had made up his mind to devote himself entirely to the study of mathematics, he is sure to have secured a place in the front rank of world-mathematicians." Let us now refer to what was his most important work in the realm of mathematical study and research—his paper on Monge's Differential Equation to all Conics. Let us again quote from the late Mr. A. C. Bose, himself a prominent Mathematician and Fellow, Calcutta University ; says Mr. Bose : ... "Those who have studied Differential Equations, specially in Boole's work, have come across in the early part of it, the General Differential Equation to lines of the second order, an equation of the formidable character. This Differential Equation was first arrived at by the great French Mathematician Gaspard Monge, Compe de Peluse in 1810 and Boole had added the remark :—'But, here, our powers of geometrical interpretations fail and results such as this can be scarcely otherwise useful than a *registry of integrable forms*. Mr. Mookerjee not only dealt with various methods of deriving the Mongian and interpreting the same... the characteristic "permanency of the form" of the Mongian.. gave a critical review of the geometrical interpretation of it by such eminent Mathematician as Prof. Sylvester. He concluded that Sylvester's was not the geometrical interpretation of the Mongian as contemplated by Boole and what Boole sought for in vain was yet to be discovered. This was in 1887. In 1888 Asutosh had solved



the problem of geometrical interpretation of the Mongian!—(he was only 24 now)...Since Boole's now famous remark about the failure of our powers of geometrical interpretation of Mongian, two attempts have been made, one by Lt. Col. Allan Cunningham R.E. and the other by Prof. Sylvester, to make good the failure. ... He (Asutosh) showed that the geometrical interpretation given by each of the two Mathematicians mentioned above, was not the true interpretation contemplated by Boole. He pointed out that Cunningham's was the geometric interpretation, not of the Mongian, but one of its first five integrals which Asutosh actually calculated and that Sylvester's was out of mark as failing to furnish a property of the conic as would lead to a geometric quality which vanishes at every point of every conic. Asutosh himself arrived at the following interpretation of the Mongian:—'The radius of curvature of the Aberrancy curve vanishes at every point of every conic' and he showed all the tests which every geometrical interpretation ought to satisfy...this was a definite and remarkable achievement. The geometric interpretation sought for by the mathematicians for thirty years, since Boole wrote his famous lines, was at last found by Asutosh and the justice of the criticism was acknowledged by men like Prof. Arthur Cayley whom even Sylvester called the High Pontiff among Mathematicians. Cayley remarked about this criticism of Asutosh— 'It is, of course, all perfectly right'...Cunningham wrote, "Prof. Asutosh



Mukhopadhyaya has proposed really excellent mode of geometric interpretation of differential equations in general. This is the most *direct* geometrical interpretation yet proposed." Mr. A. C. Bose adds "Asutosh's solutions...made it clear that here was a geometer of great power who, would, if left untrammelled by other pursuits, win a prominent place among the world's mathematicians." If these random rambles into, if these occasional contributions of his early youth, towards the Mathematical science, won him so striking an European reputation and established his title to be ranked among the prominent mathematicians of the age, who knows, the measure of his unrealized greatness and the height of his unattained eminence! What laurels might not have fallen to his lot had he cared to follow this natural bend of his genius! but alas! that was not to be. He elected to be a man of action—to be a serving, sacrificing, burning patriot, plodding, fighting, working his weary way, all his life. And great, indeed, was the price that he had to pay for his consuming love for his 'almamater', for his patriotic fervour, for his passion for patriotic work. As Dr. C. V. Raman truly remarks... "Bengal in gaining a distinguished Judge and a great Vice-Chancellor lost in him a still greater mathematician. If his clear incisive intellect, wonderful memory and tireless energy had been devoted to a lifetime of mathematical research, he might have stood higher in the mathematical world than any of his contem-



poraries; what he did accomplish in the few short years he devoted to the subject is still worthy of study and an encouragement to the present generation of aspirants to mathematical fame in India.....”

We can not, however, close this part of our study by emphasising what is, to all appearance, a melancholy aspect of his life; if he did not leave behind, any great original work in the domain of letters or science, commensurate with his genius, his industry and his erudition, surely he left, as his lifework, a superb structure, at once monumental, massive and magnificent—a centre of an intellectual activities, a nursery of scholars and thinkers, of future leaders in life and in society—a University, living and thriving, which is really ‘the crown of our national edifice.’ No doubt it required the sacrifice of the profound and versatile scholar, of the intellectual giant and genius in mathematics; but surely the sacrifice was not uncalled for—perhaps it was not too great; India which has produced in recent times such intellectual giants as Ranade and Tilak, Ramanujam and Rajendra Lall, Rash Behari, and Surendra Nath—not to speak of the living great, can not boast of another Asutosh, who could have done what he did; for he and he alone possessed the rare combinations of diverse qualities and attainments that he placed at the service of his ‘alma mater.’ To have thought and worked out the multifarious plans and schemes, to have constructed



and matured the vast organizations and agencies, to have conceived and executed the farreaching policies and ambitious programmes, to have safely steered the immense ship in uncharted waters, all these and more, in furtherance of the highest studies and researches—required not only the ‘patience of Job and the wisdom of Solomon’...but also the gigantic brain of the greatest intellectual giant that he was. To quote Dr. Raman again, it is really, ‘a matter of astonishment that it has been at all possible to bring together such a body of workers, to reconcile so many conflicting aims, ideals and interests’ to advance the cause of the highest studies and researches in so many different and diverse departments. It was possible in Calcutta—and not any where else in India—mainly because there was here such a colossal brain—so great an intellectual giant at the head of the immense and expanding organization. “To have” truly said Dr. Taraporewalla, “such a gigantic brain at the head of all departments led to a correlation and co-ordination of the various parts which would have been impossible without him.” And we have nothing to be sorry for the result; for the result was, in the words of Dr. Sylvain Levi, ‘a new generation of young scholars as devoted as their forefathers to the search of truth, but able to search, on new lines;’ and the new generation that sprang up has taken up the torch which he lighted—the torch of Truth and Knowledge, of



Progress and Freedom—the torch which is contributing its quota to the world illumination. So it will not do merely to regret the absence of any great original work in the world of letters and science; we have much to rejoice over the fact that endowed as he was with manysided and massive intellectual powers, destined as he was to be the greatest intellectual giant of his generation, his greatness lay in his 'sympathy for scholars', in his 'enthusiasm for learning,' in his 'power to communicate them to all near him'—his greatness lay in his capacity to infuse into all around him his own lofty spirit, his own sturdy patriotism, his own undying idealism. And as Emerson says, "this is the key to the power of greatest men—their spirit diffuses itself."



CHAPTER VII.

The Brilliant Judge.

His pre-eminent position in the premier High Court—His brilliant record—The importance and intrinsic worth of his judgments—Some of them referred to—His last memorable judgment, a historic one—His criticism of various parties—Refutation of the Stephens (J)'s interpretation of Sec. 34 of Indian Penal Code, his search for principles and precedents from far and near, his own authoritative interpretation and terse comments—His remarks on the trial—His clear interpretation and disapproval of the limited jurisdiction created by Clauses 25 and 26 of the Letters Patent—His reference to the British procedure of invoking clemency of the Crown—His reasons for dismissal—Striking tributes of the Bench and the Bar as well as of the Press on his retirement—Factors contributing to his singular success on the Bench—Estimate of Sir Sivaswamy Iyer.

The High Court of Judicature at Fort William in Bengal—as the Calcutta High Court is called—enjoys a pre-eminent position among the highest Courts of Justice established by our rulers in India; and the factors contributing to this pre-eminence are both historic and intrinsic; Calcutta has not only been the premier city and, until quite lately, the capital of British India; but it is the 'London of the East'; while these factors have invested its High Court with an importance all its own—the galaxy of legal talents and intellects, the brilliant jurists and lawyers, both European and Indian, who have sat on its Bench or laboured at the Bar, have shed a lustre upon it; they have



enhanced its reputation and its prestige and created a tradition that is almost unexcelled in the legal world of India. And in the illustrious role of the Advocates and Vakils who have upheld its lofty tradition and have adorned its Bench or the Bar, there are few, whose careers in it were more brilliant, and who were greater jurists than Mr. Justice Asutosh Mookerjee; with Mr. Justice Dwarka Nath Mittra and Sir James Colvile, Sir Barnes Peacock, Sir William Garth, Sir Guroodas Banerjee, Sir Ramesh Chandra Mitter, Sir Chandra Madhab Ghosh, Sir Laurence Jenkins and some others of their calibre, Asutosh may justly be said to be one of the brightest ornaments of its Bench.

A much misunderstood, much criticised man as he was, thanks to his manysided activities and interests and his virile and versatile personality, Asutosh built, by dint of his strenuous exertions and unrivalled erudition, his unique independence and legal acumen, a reputation second, to that of none of his brother Judges throughout the length and breadth of the land. The fact was his pre-eminence as a Judge and a jurist received universal recognition and there was a consensus of legal and judicial opinion that not only did he maintain but also raised, the high tradition of the premier High Court of India, handed down by his some of his illustrious predecessors on the Bench; it is admitted on all hands—and even bitterest critics and worst antagonists do not deny—that he



upheld the claims, and proved to demonstration; the ability and fitness, of his countrymen to hold and adorn the highest offices, independently of the British rulers—in the judicial sphere at any rate. It is for his biographer to deal adequately with his stupendous labours and his remarkable achievements as a Judge; and none but an erudite lawyer can do justice to them; we can only touch upon this aspect of his public life. No student of contemporary events in India, no one, who takes any interest in the affairs of this country or in the activities of its great men, not to speak of those who can boast of some acquaintance with the proceedings of the High Courts, during the long period of Asutosh's career on the Bench, can fail to come across or be impressed with his monumental judgments. And many and various important cases it was his lot to try; naturally enough, very many difficult and complicated questions of law and procedure, numerous problems of succession and inheritance, innumerable matters of supreme importance to the state or to the individual, he had to deal with; and in his treatment of these, he left nothing to be desired but won universal admiration and appreciations of his striking ability and his unique independence. The fact is his is a name to conjure with, in the legal world and so far as Bengal is concerned, no one commands—now that he is dead and gone—greater admiration and homage than Justice Asutosh Mookerjee.



We have seen that Asutosh's father meant his son to be a High Court Judge; Asutosh himself aspired, quite early in his boyhood, to the Bench; but perhaps seldom, if ever, did he, in the highest flights of his infant fancy, dream that he would, in after life, leave such indelible marks of his labours in the annals of the High Court of which he was to be the a central figure as long. The immense popularity and the universal fame that he acquired and enjoyed may be judged by the fact that though Law is an intricate, learned and technical subject, his judgments attracted the greatest notice and were read and reread all over the land, and won him a name for independence and integrity, erudition and originality, fairness and justice, which was and which is the envy and admiration of one and all. His activities on the Bench, his manly and judicious conduct of the sensational as well as lesser cases, his calm and quiet temper, his unperturbed judicial mind, his sense of equity and fairness, his spirit of independence and dignity, and last but not least, his genial and endearing personality are part of the tradition of the premier Court of Justice in India and serve as a great example to his learned brothers on the Bench. The Hon'ble Sir Dawson Miller, Chief Justice of Patna High Court referred to him thus. "Although, more eloquent tongue than mine will, at the proper time, do justice to his achievement and character, I may say that the name of Sir Asutosh Mookerjea is a household word



throughout the High Courts of India. His judgments were invariably lucid and a masterful exposition of law on every subject with which they deal They have only to be quoted to command universal respect."

Perhaps it may be said without fear of contradiction and without any disparagement to his learned brothers belonging to the various High Courts that few deserved, and none in greater degree, so great a respect as to be universally cited as authority; and the reasons are not far to seek; Asutosh was not only one of the greatest intellectual giants and a most profound and versatile scholar of his generation—a veritable walking encyclopaedia; he was, moreover, a prince among men and a prince of judges for that; his unique spirit of independence and fairness, the clarity of his vision and breadth of his outlook, the sureness of his grasp of the fundamental principles and the firmness of his grip of actualities of his case at hand, the wealth of his erudition and fund of his learning as well as his profound researches and deep dive into the region of authorities and sources and precedents, combined with his sturdy common sense and never-failing sense of equity, made him one of the greatest jurist-judges of our land. Like his famous Convocation Addresses, his judgments are remarkable in many respects; they reveal at once, the makings of the jurist, the eminence of the Judge as well as the greatness of the man; on the one hand, his judgments are verily the



monuments of his legal scholarship and wisdom, his unrivalled knowledge of, and his unsurpassed capacity to apply, the fundamental principles underlying the mass of unwritten law, local usages and practices of our society and our country; on the other hand, they constitute a standing testimony to his ability and his anxiety to deal with one and all, to deal between man and man, between an individual and the society or the state or a corporation, to deal with the rich and the poor, the high and the low, and to deal with them all, fairly and squarely. He never feared the frowns of the powers that be; nor did he care for their favours; he always called a spade a spade, in no uncertain terms and gave, the devil his due, and rendered unto Caesar what was Caesar's; he was the spirit of fairness and justice and independence incarnate as it were, on the Bench.

But his judgments have yet another and not a less striking aspect; in most of these he had occasions to lay bare the subtleties and expound the complexities, of law, to solve various intricate problems and to deal with many difficult questions; none the less did he express himself in such lucid and straight forward manner, put them in such dignified, easy and attractive way that they appealed to the public in general, besides the lawyers; it is no wonder that his judgments afford profitable and interesting reading even to those who are strangers to Law; really is rebounds to his lasting glory that they are not only masterpieces as 'lucid expositions of law' but are also.



unexcelled in force of exposition, in treatment of authorities and precedents in wealth of erudition and researches, in breadth of view and common sense.

It is difficult to distinguish between his important judgments and emphasise some and relegate others to the back ground ; most of them are equally striking. Let us, however, refer, at random, to a few of the important cases that he had occasion to deal with in his later years. Firstly let us take the case of Chandra Kanto Ghosh versus the Calcutta Improvement Trust. This was of considerable importance to the public and attracted a good deal of attention in the press. Calcutta Improvement Trust was and is a very powerful body, patted on the back by the Government as well as by the European press and the public in Calcutta ; and Mr. C. H. Bomphas, its original Chairman was their prizeboy ; rightly or wrongly they decided to have the land of one Chandra Kanto Ghosh ; against their decision, this gentleman brought a suit in the High Court, on the ground that his land was situated at a safe distance from the line of their operation and so the Trust could not claim his land in that position. But Mr. Justice Greaves who tried the case gave his decree for the Trust. Against this decree, an appeal was preferred by Chandra Kanto Ghosh and it was heard by the Appellate Bench presided over by Mr. Justice Mookerjee, who upheld the contention of the poor man and decided against the all-powerful Trust.

This decision and judgment of Sir Asutosh



Mookerjee were hailed with no little relief, and received with enthusiasm, by the whole Indian population of the city, as they sought to curb down the overzealous activities of the Trust in improving many quarters of Calcutta out of existence and making hundreds and thousands of the poor middle class people homeless; it must, moreover, be borne in mind that the immense resources and enormous influence of the pampered Trust, were requisitioned and hurled against the puny efforts of a poor citizen to save his hearth and home from demolition. No doubt, the judgment of Mr. Justice Mookerjee was, ultimately reversed by the Privy Council—for it was contended that it cut the very ground from under the feet of Mr. Bompas—the Indian public and the Indian press refused to accept the Privy Council's decision but clung to Mr. Justice Mookerjee's, as true and right.

Another case of importance to the public came before him sitting in Appellate Bench. A respectable gentleman at Howrah—an Executive Engineer P. W. D.—and one or two of his people were severely assaulted and actually laid violent hands on by the police; the gentleman brought a criminal case and some members of the police got a few years' rigorous imprisonment; but an appeal was preferred and the sentence was prayed to be reduced; Mr. Justice Mookerjee, however, rejected the appeal, refused to reduce the sentence, held it to be lenient instead of being stiff, complemented the complainant



—the Executive Engenier—on his ‘public spirit’ in bringing the case against the ruthless and omnipotent police and passed a severe stricture upon the latter. Sir Asutosh was called upon to try, along with Mr. Justice Hoolmhood and Sir Laurence Jenkins C. J.—who between themselves, constituted a Special Tribunal—to try one of the most sensational cases—the Musulmanpara Bomb case.

This case was of peculiar significance and of particular importance, coming as it did in wake of similiar other cases; it was construed to be directly due to, and proof positive of, a well-organized and widespread revolutionary movement of criminal patriotism or anarchism, working underground and taking to bombs and pistols, indiscriminately; as it deserved, the case was elaborately prepared, ably conducted and stoutly fought by the Government; the accused—who was an educated Bengali youth—was defended by Mr. Langford James. The special Tribunal acquitted the accused and set the poor young Bengali at liberty; Sir Asutosh delivered a very short but concurring and crushing—judgment of a few sentences only, in which he mercilessly exposed the unscrupulous ways of the police and pithily, sternly remarked that their attempt to ‘connect’ an innocent youth with ‘a dastardly crime’ had absolutely failed. This short judgment—one of the very shortest—was characteristic of the man and indicative of his firm attitude at the inefficiency and high handedness



of the executive and the police, of his stern unbending independence and his uncompromising and absolutely fearless nature. It is no use multiplying instances. Let us, refer at some length to his last judgment, delivered on the eve of his retirement from the Bench. This learned and elaborate judgment of his is said to be a masterly pronouncement on intricate points of law and procedure; it is really a characteristic and striking judgment from more than one point of view. Not only does it display the extraordinary fund of erudition and intelligence of the jurist-judge; his singular thirst and characteristic search for authorities and precedents amidst a labyrinth of findings of the highest Courts in India and in a mass of decisions of British and even American Courts; his unique industry and unsurpassed knowledge of law and case-law together with his illuminating comments thereon; but also does it contain fair and unequivocal criticism of the conducts of the defending Counsel, the Advocate General and of the trial Judge! It is not, however possible, within our limited scope, to attempt to do full justice to this masterly judgment, which is typical of his.

The case is known as Sankaritola Post Office Murder Case, better still as Emperor versus Barendra Kumar Ghosh. The accused, a young, newly married man scarcely out of his teens, was charged with murdering, with a revolver, the Post Master of



Sankaritola Post Office, Calcutta, not alone but in company of three or four other unknown persons. He was committed to Sessions and was tried and sentenced to death by Mr. Justice Page. But before the trial took place the Counsel for the accused saw the Judge privately in his Chamber; he said to His Lordship, that they 'felt the case to be a difficult one' and asked him whether he would treat the accused leniently if the accused pleaded guilty to the major charge. Mr. Justice Page could, however, give no assurance or information as to what he would do at the trial. Then a certificate was obtained from the Advocate General, Bengal under Clause, 26 of the Letters Patent, for a review of the case; and the application for review was heard by a Full Bench presided over by Sir Asutosh who delivered a lengthy and a very interesting, instructive and illuminating judgment. As we have just said, this last and most remarkable judgment of his reveals at once the Judge, the jurist and the man in the proper perspective; as a Judge, he was bound to move within the four corners of Law; as a jurist he outstript its narrow limits, but went far beyond, the four corners of Law—the particular Indian Law that it was his duty to abide by—and investigated into the sources and precedents, instituting comparisons and analogies from far and near; in a comprehensive survey and critical review of these, he not only took cognizance of most of the relevant judgments



and findings of all the High Courts and Chief Courts in India and Burma but of those of British and American Courts. And he did not even stop at merely referring to famous findings of Indian Judges and to those of numerous jurists as also to other authorities, British and Indian, he went so far as to offer his comments and criticisms on the important provisions and procedure of law as it stands at present; while reviewing the actions of various parties in the trial, he criticised them—the defending Counsel, the Advocate General who happened to be the power behind the throne in Bengal, as well as the trial Judge, a newly appointed British colleague of his on the Bench—in a strict and striking, dignified and impartial way, and this showed the metal the man was made of; but no one who has even a cursory reading of this interesting judgment will deny that he has been fair to the respectable, and high personages he had had occasion to criticise; for he referred to various cases in the British Courts where the advocates lost faith in their case or were convinced of the guilt of the accused and saw the trying Judge. But he found no real analogy between the present case and those in the British Courts; hence he criticised the conduct of the defending Counsel as well as of the Judge, a colleague of his on the present Bench in these words, "...This much appears to me to be incontestable that it is not his (defending Counsel's) duty to approach the trial Judge and to asprise him that in his opinion the



man whose fate has been entrusted his care, has no defence to make. I venture to add, that if, as trial Judge, I had been placed in such predicament, I would, without hesitation, have reported the Counsel concerned to the Chief Justice, for disciplinary action, and would have asked to be relieved of the duty of participating in the trial and in passing sentence upon a man whose Counsel had previously assured me that there was no defence to make..." The Advocate General came in for his share of criticism, for granting a certificate for review of the case under Clause 26 of the Letters Patent, *ex parte* and without sufficient materials. "The fact remains" proceeded Mr. Justice Mookerjee, "that statements were made in the petition presented to the Advocate General, which are either inaccurate or are not supported by the evidence on record...In my view, the certificate of the Advocate General...should be granted after he has heard the representatives of the prisoner and of the Crown and has carefully considered all the available materials whose accuracy has been verified by Counsel or other responsible persons. If this course has been pursued in the present case before the certificate was granted, there would have been no occasion for an unseemly dispute as to the weight to be attached to the certificate". To cut a long story short, we will refer to only three points in this monumental document. The most important of these is Mr. Justice Mookerjee's elaborate and



learned discourses and detailed references as to the true construction to be put upon Sec. 34 of the Indian Penal Code in view of the overwhelming volume of authoritative legal and judicial opinion of British and Indian Courts; second is his admission that the accused had not had a fair enough trial in the Sessions Court; thirdly, his consideration and interpretation of the Clauses 25, 26 of the Letters Patent under which a review or retrial was sought. Section 34 of the Indian Penal Code runs thus: "When a criminal act is done by several persons, in furtherance of the common intention of all, each of such persons is liable for that act in the same manner as if it were done by him alone." The Advocate General "certified that whether the direction and the nondirection (as specified by him), amount in law to misdirection, should be further considered by the Court"; and this direction or nondirection was contended to be contained in these passages of summing up by Mr. Justice Page. "In this case, if these three persons went to that place with the common intention to rob the Post Master, and if necessary, to kill him, and if death resulted, each of them is liable, whichever of the three fired the fatal shot. If you come to the conclusion that these three or four persons came into the Post Office with that intention to rob, if necessary to kill, and death resulted from their act, if that be so, you are to find a verdict of guilty. I say if you doubt that it was the pistol of the accused



which fired the fatal shot, that does not matter. If you are satisfied, on the otherhand, that the shot was fired by one of those persons in furtherance of the common intention, if that be so, then it is your duty to find a verdict of guilty." It was contended, proceeded Mr. Justice Mookerjee, that thus a wrong construction was put upon the scope and effect of the Section 34 of the Indian Penal Code and in its support, the judgment of Mr. Justice Stephens in *Emperor versus Nirmalkanta Roy* was relied upon; the latter (Stephens. J.) stated his views and findings as follows: "A and B set out to murder C. Both fire pistols at him, A hits him and kills him, B misses him. Does B's act come under Section 34?...I hold as the act in question was the killing of C and as that was represented as having been done by A alone, the section did not apply to the case." Mr. Justice Stephens's was opposed to the views held on the Section by the judicial authorities as well as to those of Mr. Maine; but he believed that these latter view is wrong, and proceeded to attempt a historical and critical survey, in order to discover the 'source of error.' Mr. Justice Mookerjee quoted at length from Mr. Justice Stephens and made a most elaborate, most learned and impartial analysis and review of the numerous judicial and authoritative legal opinions, and views on the Section—which form the characteristic features of his judgments and disclose his unique and encyclopedic knowledge and erudition in law



and jurisprudence ; His Lordship continued, " This analysis '—which we need not go into in detail— "of the course of decisions in the different Courts which administer criminal justice according to the Indian Penal Code discloses a deep-seated divergence of judicial opinion as to the true interpretation of Section 34. The apparent simplicity of the language of the Section is delusive, as it furnishes no test to determine when a particular criminal act may be said to have been 'done by several persons'. There we have the jurist rising above the limitations of the law and laying his fingers on those limitations and defects, not content to live, move, have his being within the four walls of the law as it stands. "In my judgment," held Mr. Justice Mookerjee 'the exposition given by Stephens J, places too narrow an interpretation upon Sec. 34 and that the question whether a particular criminal act may be properly held to have been 'done by several persons' within the meaning of the Section can not be answered regardless of the facts of the case.....the balance of reason and authority is, in my opinion, against the limited interpretation placed by Stephens J. on Sec. 34 in *Emperor v. Nirmalkanta Roy* and I must hold accordingly that the first point specified in the certificate of the Advocate General, that direction, erroneous in law, was given, can not be sustained.' The real truth was not that the summing up was 'inadequate,' specially regard being had to the 'perfunctionary



cross examination' but that the 'defence theory has not been laid in the evidence'; and His Lordship had serious doubts as to whether, the accused could be said to have had 'a fair trial'; that the cross examination and consequently the defence, was most unsatisfactory—and it is no part of His Lordship's business to find out if this was due to the advice the Counsel for the accused received at the hands of the trial Judge, the advice, namely, 'that they were not entitled to set up any substantive defence in opposition to the case of the Crown'—may be judged by the fact that material point was elicited from the Crown witnesses not by cross examination but in reply to the Court's query; and he rightly held such grave defects "in the conduct of the defence case can not in such circumstances be remedied except by retrial if such retrial is permissible under the law." And to ascertain how far—if at all—the High Court enjoys the power, and has the jurisdiction to order the retrial nothing short of which was the remedy in the present case and, is so, in very many cases, brings him to a consideration of the Clauses 25 and 26 of the Letters Patent which define the powers and jurisdiction of the High Court in these circumstances. In the words of Sir Asutosh, 'Clause 25 ordains that there shall be no appeal from any sentence or order passed or made in any criminal trial before the High Court as a Court of Original Criminal Jurisdiction. The trial Judge, however, is granted discretion to reserve



any point or points of law for the opinion of the High Court. Clause 26 contemplates in addition a case where the Advocate General has certified that in his judgment there is an error in the decision of a point or points of law decided by the trial Judge or that a point or points of law which has or have been decided by the trial Judge should be further considered. Clause 26 provides that in both the classes of cases that is, where a point of law has been reserved by the trial Judge, or where a certificate has been granted by the Advocate General, the High Court shall have full power and authority to review the case, or such part of it as may be necessary, and finally determine such point or points of law and thereupon to alter the sentence passed by the trial Court and to pass judgment and sentence as to the High Court shall seem right." In the present case, although the accused might not have had fair enough trial the trial might have been vitiated by the peculiar attitude or prejudice of his Counsel and by 'perfunctionary cross examination', the Letters Patent do not grant any relief or remedy the defects, the certificate of the Advocate General notwithstanding. The circumstances in which the High Court can review or direct a retrial are absent, there is no reservation of any point or points of law, by the trial Judge ; nor is the suggestion or supposition—in the certificate—that there might be an error in the decision of a point or points of law, sustained. The Court in the first



instance, examined and determined the point of law, reserved or certified ; and it is only in case of the Court's deciding this point in favour of the accused, it proceeds to consider the question of alteration of the sentence passed by the trial Court and where the Court decides this point against the accused it does not,—in the present case, it did not—proceed further.

It is clear that the powers and jurisdiction of the High Court are extremely limited and well defined, under Clauses 25 and 26 of the Letters Patent, so far as the review or retrial of a case tried at the 'Original Criminal Jurisdiction' is concerned. Hence his hands were literally tied and he could not, under the law,—as it stands—order a retrial or alter the sentence or the conviction even though, he had 'serious doubts' as to whether the accused might be said to have had a 'fair trial'; for "the matters" which in his judgment, 'have tended to affect the fairness of the trial are not mentioned in the certificate. In the second place, as neither of the two points specially certified has been sustained, we can not pass from the second to the third stage where alone the question of the alteration of the sentence can come under consideration." This state of things is, no doubt, to be regretted ; and in his own words, 'it may seem unsatisfactory that the jurisdiction created by Clauses 25, 26 of the Letters Patent should be so limited in scope and that its exercise should be subject to such stringent conditions



...If the Court of Criminal Appeal in England—which found it impossible to grant relief by way of appeal, though it did not hesitate to express the opinion that circumstances might justify the intervention of the Secretary of State with a view to the exercise of the clemency of the Crown—found itself in this position, we can not put an extended construction on Clauses 25, 26 of Letters Patent'. So Mr. Justice Mookerjee dismissed the application of review, as he had no other alternative under the law as it stands; as he himself put it, "In my opinion, there is no escape from the conclusion that as neither of the two points of law specially certified by the Advocate General can be answered in favour of the accused, his application for review must be dismissed so far as exercise of the powers conferred on this Court by Cl. 26 of Letters Patent is concerned." To sum up, in the course of this historic judgment Mr. Justice Mookerjee first of all, criticised properly, the conduct of the Counsel of the accused, of the Advocate General as well as of the trial Judge, at the High Court sessions—a task which is as difficult as it is delicate.

With a most comprehensive and sweeping survey of, and elaborate references to, authoritative judicial and legal opinion and findings Indian, European and American, Sir Asutosh refuted the narrow construction sought to be put upon Sec. 34 of the Indian Penal Code and put rightly, and once for all, what should and must be the true interpretation



of the section. Then he discussed the scope and effect of the Clauses 25 and 26 of Letters Patent, defining the powers and jurisdiction of High Court to review or direct a retrial of a case disposed of in the Original Criminal Jurisdiction; in conclusion he found that the Court, could not grant relief in the present case, under the limited jurisdiction created by the Clauses 25 and 26 of the Letters Patent; hence he dismissed the prayer of the accused; but before this, he criticised the simplicity of the language of the Sec. 34 of Penal Code and characterized it as 'delusive' in this that it gives no 'test' to determine what is it that constitutes the criminal act referred to in the section; then he was of opinion that the accused had not had a fair enough trial mainly for the reason that both the defence Counsel as well as the trial Judge were prejudiced against the accused; but he could give no relief; the Court had no jurisdiction to do so, under Clauses 25 and 26 (Letters Patent) as he construed them; but he expressed his dissatisfaction at the limited jurisdiction of the Court, and at the 'stringent conditions' (of its exercise) created by the Clauses, he ended by referring to the practice adopted in England of invoking the clemency of the Crown and he might almost be said to have hinted at a similar course in the present case.

It is interesting to note the tributes of respect and appreciation of his brilliant career on the Bench, that were showered upon him on the eve of his



retirement by those most competent to give their opinion and express their views—his Hon'ble Colleagues and the leaders of the different branches of profession : when he sat for the last time on Friday the 21st December 1923, the legal profession as well as general public mustered strong in Chief Justice's Courtroom—where all his brother Judges were assembled to bid him farewell—and a touching and, one might say, a unique farewell, it really was. Mr. Basanta Kumar Bose, President of the Vakils' Association said in the course of an address, "Your career as a Judge has been characterised throughout by profound learning, great ability, marked independence, unerring patience and uniform courtesy...Your successful and brilliant career as a Judge is a source of pride to the members of the profession to which you belonged, and will ever remain an illustrious example to the body." "Apart from the brilliance of your career on the Bench," said the Advocate General, Mr. B. L. Mitter, "You have earned the esteem and affection of the Bar by your uniform courtesy, quick appreciation and constant encouragement of diffident merit. In the maze and labyrinth of adjudged cases, you ever walked with a firm step, holding aloft the torch of justice. You demonstrated the truth of the old saying, 'No precedents can justify absurdity.'" Sir Lancelot Sanderson, the 'Chief Justice, said on behalf of his learned brothers as well as of himself, "...The many activities of the learned Judge present

a proposition of such dimensions that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to deal adequately with it in the short time which is at my disposal...In all that he has done during the many years that he has sat on the Bench, I am convinced that he has been actuated by one desire only, namely, to maintain the great traditions of this Court and to promote the administration of justice in all its branches... His great knowledge, his wonderful memory and his untiring energy have been devoted to this purpose for nearly twenty years and his service in this respect will always be remembered and will constitute a record of which any man is entitled to be proud. He has been an outstanding personality not only in the Court but also in Bengal and I think I may say with propriety that his name has been known and his influence felt throughout the whole of India...."

The 'Indian Daily News' in the course of a leading article, said, "His career was one of exceptional brilliance and he summed up in his person all the best attributes of a Judge...Sir Asutosh as a Judge ceases to exist from to day but his great work on the Bench will endure for ever. If it is true, that Judge-made law is, after all, the best law, Sir Asutosh's contributions in this respect have been simply invaluable. And when posterity comes to review his work as a Judge, it will find how eminent he was..." The 'Forward' said, "Between



them they (Sir Rash Behari his Guru and Sir Asutosh) had fully maintained, the premier position of Bengal in the intellectual aristocracy of India. A walking encyclopaedia of legal knowledge, Sir Asutosh combined in him all the qualities that go to make a great Judge. To the firmness and fairness of a Sir Barnes Peacock, the learning and patience of a Dwarka Nath Mitter, he added industry to a degree never attained by any of his predecessors or colleagues. He never allowed himself to forget that the spirit of the law was greater than the letter of it and justice divorced from equity was no justice at all. His judgments which will go down to posterity as a valuable contribution to the legal literature of the world bear on them the impress not only of deep learning but of consummate skill in bringing out the true aim of law. He was not the slave of law, as many judges are, but the master of it..."

"Speaking of Sir Asutosh's judicial career" wrote the 'Calcutta Weekly Notes', "the outstanding feature, was undoubtedly his erudition. His reported judgments which touch and illuminate almost every topic of legal learning, collected together, would cover volumes. It will be years before it will be possible to appraise correctly at their real worth the service he has rendered in exploring and interpreting a system of law which is not the less difficult of application and elucidation because it is so largely and incoherently statutory with untiring



industry and wide research he carried on for twenty years a work initiated by the late Sir Bhashyam Ayyangar. This alone would have been sufficient to perpetuate his memory as one of the most eminent judges and lawyers India has produced",...

One of the greatest jurist-judges, one of the brilliant and learned advocates as Asutosh was, what were the factors contributing to this aspect of his eminence? The principal factor, apart from his inborn genius, was to be traced to his character, its unrivalled capacity to take infinite pains—to his industry—to his innate thoroughness and his scholastic habits and tendencies; from his boyhood he never did things by halves; he never spared himself any pains; either in letters, science or in law, he never acknowledged any 'scientific frontier', to use a happy expression of Lord Curzon's; he was always after 'fresh fields and pastures new'; he was not content either with stating the law on the point or with his search for authorities within the four corners of Indian Courts but often commented on, and criticised the former and added to the value of his judgments by referring to the British and American judicial and legal authorities and precedents. As he himself said in the course of his farewell speech to the Bench and the Bar, "During the twenty years that I have been privileged to administer justice in the name of my Sovereign in this great Court, I have never spared myself in the discharge of my responsible



duties...I have worked strenuously in the firm belief that without great labour success can not be attained and it would have been impossible otherwise to do justice in dealing with those important and abstruse questions which have come before me for adjudication in the course of my career...My ambition has been to attain the ideal of judicial administration, to hear patiently, to consider diligently, to understand rightly, to decide justly..." So the measure of his industry was the measure of his erudition which to quote the 'Calcutta Weekly Notes', was, 'the outstanding feature of Sir Asutosh's judicial career' Indeed the measure of his erudition and independence was also the measure of his success and brilliance as a Judge and his eminence as a jurist. Accustomed as he was to the exact sciences from his boyhood, it is to their continued study and influence, that he owed not a little of that mental balance and disciplined mind, that accuracy of expression and exactitude of deduction and interpretation, that grip of the actualities of the present as well as that grasp of the fundamental principles, which combined with his industry and his erudition, his intellectual powers and his sincerity, his independence of thought and courage of conviction made his name illustrious in the annals of highest Courts of Justice in British India. Moreover the spirit of enquiry, the thirst for original thinking, the aptitude for intellectual activities, the urge of the ardent student and the call and qualities of the



great research scholar that made themselves felt in his college days but met no response in the whirlwind of his multifarious and unceasing activities of his much too crowded life, found some scope in his judicial labours, in his monumental works on the Bench, in his comments on, and historical investigation and analysis into, as well as his search for, sources and analogies, antecedents and authorities, legal principles, theories and practices, codes and formulae, standard judicial opinions and legislations—not only of his own country but also of foreign lands. A learned jurist and scholarly Judge, as he was, his outlook was broad and he regarded law as not only ancient, but growing and thriving, adapting itself to the vital needs and supreme necessities of the age and society in which it lives; all these tended to make him a great lawgiver, and it is a pity he was not one. It is no doubt true, that no Judges in India dived more deeply into the region of authorities and precedents, Indian, European and American; never-the-less Asutosh was not a blind follower of authorities, however great and varied; he did not depend upon precedents and sources too much; we have it from Dr. Nares Ch. Sen Gupta, at that time a very junior member of the Vakil Bar, that on one occasion he gave his decree in his favour, notwithstanding three distinct authorities against his contention; this one instance may be said to be typical



of the judge as well as of the man; he would not hesitate, to go against a hundred high—or even highest—authorities, if he was convinced he was in the right; he was, moreover, always alive to the fact, that under the system of administration of justice in British India, a Judge has not merely to follow law in the abstract, but also, and very often, too, put new interpretation on, give new construction to it, which then acquires the force and authority of fresh law. thus he has, in three well-known judgments, laid down a governing principle that a Hindu has a right to engage his priest for performing his religious ceremonies and no one—no priest of a particular locality or a particular place—can claim a monopoly of service on that score. Let us conclude by referring to the words of Sir P. S. Sivaswamy Iyer, a veteran and famous public man, an ex-Advocate General and Executive Councillor, of Madras—‘In ability, erudition and strong common sense, he was easily the foremost among the Judges of the Indian High Courts. The days of English Judges who were great jurists and made marked contributions to the growth of law were probably gone for ever in India...If we wish to appraise the merits of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, he must be tried as he himself would have wished, by the very highest standards. It would be doing him poor justice to institute a comparison between him and the rank and file of Judges of our rather overcrowded High Courts



at the present day...Two great characteristics of Asutosh as a lawyer was his vast learning and his prodigious industry...He was not content to confine his search for principles to the usual repertories of Indian or English decision. His quest for principles took him far afield to the decision of the American Courts, not merely of the Supreme Court but also of the State Courts and to the decisions of the highest Courts of the colonies. The habit of turning for light to the American case-law and jurisprudence was first started in India by Sir S. Subrahmaniar Iyer. Sir Asutosh Mookerjee improved upon his example and revelled in the citation of American authorities, a practice beset with danger in the hands of less discriminating followers. ...It may of course be said that time spent by him in the collection of authorities left him too little time for the cultivation of quality. It may also be stated that no other Judge in India had so many varied interests making such enormous demands upon his time....'



CHAPTER VIII

The Reformer

In The Realm of Education.

The greatest reformer in the realm of Education and a creative force in the field of 'advancement of learning'—Pre-University periods—The Despatch of 1854—The Act of Incorporation and the establishment of the University of Calcutta—Lords Ripon's and Curzon's Commissions—Indian Universities Act and the Regulations framed by Asutosh's Committee—Difference between the two Acts and change in the conceptions of the Ideal and functions of the University, conditions of development—Asutosh's task—Reforms in the schools and colleges—University Law College, University Professorships and Lecturers in the domain of Letters—University College of Science and Technology, Dr. Mohendra Lall Sircar and his Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, the princely gifts and endowments of Sir Tarak Nath Palit and Sir Rash Behari Ghosh, Government's indifference—University Readership Lectures by world-renowned savants and eminent scholars—Post-Graduate Consolidation Committee and the Councils of Teaching in Arts and Science—Further gifts by Sir Rash Behari, Kumar of Khaira, S. G. C. Ghosh and Asutosh—his second Vice-Chancellorship, financial crisis,—“Reform” controversy—more departments opened—Sumtotal of his works and innovations, their criticisms and appreciations—His fidelity to the Ideal upheld by advanced thought—Far-reaching effects of his achievements.

A renowned jurist and foremost Judge, a versatile scholar and renowned mathematician, a profound idealist and a great statesman, and the very greatest friend of learning and scholarship as he was, Asutosh attained far greater eminence as an educational reformer; he was, by far, the greatest



educationist of India of today; true it was, his legal acumen, his judicial qualities and scholastic attainments, specially his massive intellectual powers and his extraordinary talents as a mathematician did not find a congenial soil in his strenuous, tedious and lifelong labours in the University; but it was in the realm of educational reform and expansions that the hero of action and the administrator, the statesman and the idealist, the uncompromising fighter and the practical worker, the constructive and organising genius, the undaunted and untiring patriot, and lastly, the greatest patron of scholarship and learning shone to the best advantage.

And his achievements as an educational reformer may be viewed from different standpoints; one might say with Tagore that "Asutosh heroically fought against heavy odds for winning freedom for our education." One might say with Dr. P. C. Roy, "If the Calcutta University has won, a recognised position in the literary and scientific centres of the world, it is due in no small measure, to his initiative and untiring energies." It is also true, as Dr. Sadler said, "He could have ruled an Empire. But he gave the best of his powers to Education." It will also rebound to his glory that he trained—as Dr. Sylvain Levi said—a "new generation of young scholars, as devoted as their forefathers to the search of Truth but able to search on new lines." Or one might as well



agree with Prof. Radhakrishnan that "his claim to greatness rests not so much on the reforms he initiated and worked out—great as they were—as on his sympathy for scholars, enthusiasm for learning and the power to communicate them to all near him." It is also perfectly true—and it can be asserted without the least fear of contradiction—that no single individual or group of individuals in the India of today, carried out, in a greater degree than—or even in an equal degree with—Asutosh, the noble and lofty 'wish' of His Majesty the King Emperor, the 'wish' namely, "that the homes of my Indian subjects may be brightened and their labour sweetened by the spread of knowledge."

But it will be impossible within the limited scope of the present study, to attempt a fuller review of his works as an educational reformer; it is, moreover, impossible to form an adequate or a just appreciation of the greatness of the man in the realm of educational reform and educational expansion—in the matter of 'advancement of learning'—without having a correct estimate of the immensity of the task and the seriousness of the problem that awaited him; it is further impossible to realize the magnitude of his achievements, the excellence of his striving and the quality of his labours and his sacrifice, unless we take into our consideration the inherent and accruing difficulties and complexities, that he had to face and



overcome. But whatever controversy there might be with regard to the policies and programmes he worked out, there is no denying the fact that the most important of all his works were in the region of educational reforms.

It was as an educationist, as a creator in the great nation-building department of education—as a foremost champion of the ‘advancement of learning’ and the architect and builder of the greatest University in India that, he has influenced the present and future generations and has moulded contemporary history as well as shaped the course of events and things in the future. The brilliant Judge and the great jurist, the forceful leader and the skilful strategist, the effective speaker and the arresting, commanding, manysided personality and versatile scholar may pass from the future public mind and may escape the admiring gaze of an interested posterity. But the great constructive and organizing genius in a vital sphere of our national life, the creative power in the realm of educational expansion, a dominant and undying force in the history of our intellectual regeneration and national progress and prosperity specially, in the domain of Letters and Science—which Asutosh really was in his life—will not be buried into oblivion; for nothing, no institution is so enduring as a University—and the University of Calcutta was his first love; it was his handiwork; ‘to the ‘University concern’s



He gave the best part of his life ; most of his activities and energies ; the chances of his study and research, the interests of his friends and family. Momentous in their nature and farreaching in their consequences as his life-long labours and his sacrifices in the cause of his University - the cause of 'the advancement of learning'—were, they can only be adequately dwelt with, if we take into our consideration briefly, at any rate, what was the state of things, what were the stages of the policy and progress of education in the last hundred years or so.

Indian Education, before Lord Curzon's Universities Act and Asutosh's regime, passed mainly through three stages and periods ; the first has been fitly described as the period of indifference. At the beginning of the last century the British rulers were, in the words of Sir C. P. Ilbert, 'far too busily engaged in making and organizing their conquests and in settling their systems of revenue and judicial administration, to have any leisure for such matters as education.' The first Lord Minto also, testified to the fact that 'science and letters are in a progressive state of decay among the natives of India...The revival of letters may become hopeless.' There were, however, stray efforts of individuals few and far between, no doubt, to establish educational institutions and the results of these are to be found in the Calcutta Madrasa, the Hindu College at Benares and the General



Assembly's Institution. Then began the struggle between what are now known as orientalism and Anglicism, with the members of the Government as the champions of the former and the leaders of the people—such as Ram Mohun Roy—of the latter; with Lord Macaulay's now famous Minute and the Resolution of Lord William Bentinck's Government Anglicism triumphed over Orientalism and it was recognised that 'a mastery of English Language and Literature was the essential factor in the Higher Education in India.' The principle that gained ground, was that the Government should be directly concerned with higher education and masses were left to fare as best as they could by the process of 'downward filtration', a process by which culture and enlightenment from the educated classes were to filter down to the lower strata of society. Then came the epoch-making despatch of Sir Charles Wood in 1854—which is still looked upon as the greatest Charter of Education. And in breadth of outlook, in the remarkable range of its policy, in the comprehensive nature of its programme—and in Lord Dalhousie's characteristic phrase, 'in magnificent audacity' the despatch has no parallel in the history of British rule in India; with courageous statesmanship the author of the despatch faced the gigantic problem of education of the whole Indian population; he recognised that the task of the British rulers was not merely to maintain order but to elevate the standards of living and promote European



knowledge and culture among the classes as well as the masses in India ; so he was alive to the needs of higher and lower—mass—education and provided for both. But what we are most interested in was that it proposed the establishment of Universities in the three Presidencies in order to provide 'the highest test and the encouragement of liberal education.' According to the directions of the Despatch, the University of Calcutta was established in 1857 by the Act of Incorporation to fulfil one of the main, if not the main, object of the Despatch—to promote and extend European education ; and our University was modelled on that of London and began its career with some 50 schools and 13 Colleges. But we must bear in mind that the University was an affiliating one and was not a centre of learning ; it was not calculated to make for the 'advancement of learning' by directly extending the bounds of knowledge through researches and original thinking and contributions. After a lapse of thirty years Lord Ripon's Commission upheld the policy and principle pursued by the University ; the figures appended to the Report of the Commission speak for themselves ; the Arts colleges rose in 1882 from 21 (with 3246 pupils) to 70 (with 7205 pupils), secondary schools from 281 (with 33, 801 pupils) to 3, 916 (with 119,752 pupils), there was a considerable rise in the number of primary schools, as also of their students. But more remarkable were the record of the first batches of graduates—



and many of them were really brilliant and shed lustre upon their alma mater—in every sphere, in every department of activities and thought; and they were pioneers in the movements for progress and reform in every direction. But these striking results notwithstanding, the University was found wanting and behind the times, for enlightened and advanced thought had underwent material and radical change in Europe and the University of London which supplied the model to the second city of Empire—was transformed, towards the close of the last century, into a regular Teaching University. During this period at the helm of affairs in India was a comparatively young, active, enthusiastic, forceful personality who was a distinguished British Universityman and of whom it is almost commonplace to say, brilliant—Lord Curzon. His Lordship, at the very outset of his career in India—in his very first Convocation Address at Calcutta—characterised the University as a mere 'examining and degree giving' body. He was determined to change the constitution and composition of the University, as also the character and complexion of education imparted under its auspices. And he appointed a small but strong Commission—which included Dr. Guroodas Banerjee—for his purpose; the Commission, presided over by a well-known Englishman who was a distinguished scholar and ardent educationist—Dr. Thomas Raleigh—reported within six months; but its Report became



not only the veritable apple of discord but—fell like a bomb shell upon the Indian circles and a fierce and virulent agitation sprang up and raged from one end of the country to the other; we have already referred to this upheaval, to the controversy and to the widespread agitation that followed the publication of the Report of the Commission and the subsequent progress of the Indian Universities Bill. Let us quote a little from the³reminiscences of the late Sir Surendra Nath Bannerjee who took a prominent part in the movement against the Bill. "The Report" says he, "was felt as a menace to the whole system of higher education in India. It reversed the policy of Education Commission of 1882...recommended abolition of second grade colleges (they formed the bulk of colleges in Bengal); fixing of minimum rate of college fees and abolition of law classes." It will be quite beyond the scope of our present study to refer at any great length to this agitation or to ascertain what exactly was the motive that urged Lord Curzon to place this most controversial piece of legislation upon the Statute Book. We are only concerned with the enormous developments, the manysided intellectual activities and the total transformation of the Calcutta University that took place under the leadership of Asutosh, after the Act came into force.

We have already seen that by this time Asutosh has already come to the front rank of Indian public men; and on matters educational, he had become



an authority, second to none; his acquaintance with the affairs of the Calcutta University—beginning from the early days of his college life—his familiarity with its inner working and life, his mastery of the facts and figures and of the principles and policies guiding academic centres equalled only by his unrivalled industry and enthusiasm, eminently fitted him for the gigantic task of reconstruction and reorganization of the University under the provisions of the New Act and the Regulations framed thereunder.

The Indian Universities Act, as it emerged from the legislative anvil, supplied only the framework of an enormous structure; to fill in the framework, was now the task that confronted the University; under Section 26 of the new Act, the Senate had had to prepare and submit to the Government of India for their sanction, a thoroughly revised and complete body of new Regulations; but they failed to comply with this provision within the prescribed time. Asutosh was now called to the helm of affairs in the University, to remodel, to reshape and reconstruct it and revolutionize its life and working. The first act of Asutosh, after his assumption of Vice-Chancellorship, was to preside over a small but strong Committee appointed by the Government to prepare the Regulations; Asutosh brought the labours of this Committee to a speedy and successful conclusion and utilizing the draft prepared by the Senate, submitted to the Government for their



sanction a complete set of Regulations and the latter were sanctioned in toto. The promulgation of the Regulations—in the preparation of which Asutosh had so a large hand—was an important landmark in the history of University education in India, for they proposed fundamental changes in the system. But the most important Regulations were those relating to the appointment of University Professors, Readers and Lecturers, the erection of University Libraries, Laboratories and Museums and their equipment and maintenance. These Regulations indicated that the University was no longer to be a purely examining and 'degree-giving body; nor even a federation of colleges' but to be ultimately a centre for cultivation and advancement of knowledge. And these were quite in keeping with the spirit of the Act.

'The University' says the Act, 'shall be and shall be deemed to have been incorporated for the purpose, among others of making provisions for the instructions of students with power to appoint University Professors, Lecturers, to hold and manage educational endowments, to erect, equip and maintain University Libraries, Laboratories and Museums .. to do all acts.....which tend to the promotion of study and research.' Asutosh very aptly brought out the difference in conception and ideal, underlying the two Acts. "The fundamental conception", he pointed out in the course of his Convocation speech in 1908, "that lies at the root of



the Act of Incorporation was that the University was to be a purely examining body. Nearly half a century later we have come to realize that the object of the University is something wider and nobler than the mere application of test—to determine the extent and accuracy of knowledge...The present conception of the function of the University is that it is an Institution for the acquisition, conservation, refinement and distribution of knowledge... Another fundamental idea is...the recognition of the claims of research in every system of advanced education." Not only this; the ideals and principles governing the lives and activities of teachers and students underwent radical change. "Every Professor" pointed out Asutosh, "must be a student and every advanced student must be animated by a higher ideal than mere absorption of knowledge." it became the duty of every Professor not only "to assimilate the existing knowledge but to contribute to the increase of knowledge—and advancement of Truth"; it also became incumbent upon the best and most capable student, to undertake post-graduate study and research. "No University" declared Asutosh in his very first Convocation Address, 'is worthy of its reputation, which does not enroll among its professors, men best fitted to advance the bounds of knowledge, which does not relieve them of administrative and tutorial work and thus does place them in a position, consistent with the most effective discharge of their legitimate duties. No University



can rightly be regarded as fulfilling the purpose of its existence unless it affords to the best of its students, adequate encouragement to carry on research, unless it enables intellectual powers, whenever detected, to exercise its highest function ;" such were—in brief—the new ideal and the new ideas, the conceptions and principles that had come and come to stay ; such were also the principles and ideals that Asutosh boldly set before himself and his countrymen in the first year of his assumption of Vice-Chancellorship and he made it, the mission of his life, the be-all and end-all of his whole being to fulfil, to realize and to accomplish as far as humanly possible—as far as his super-human energies and his herculean powers enabled him to do. And how great was the change wrought in the original ideas and old ideals will be apparent by a reference to the words of the Act of Incorporation. "It has been determined" says this Act, "to establish a University at Calcutta, for the purpose of ascertaining by purpose of examinations, the persons who have acquired proficiency in different branches of Literature, Science and Art and of rewarding them with Academical Degrees as evidence of their respective attainments..." Thus the University was a 'knowledge testing and knowledge-rewarding' institution—nothing more.

As we have already said the story of the total transformation of the University—which forms the most important and interesting chapter



in its history—is also an important part of Asutosh's life-story; the process was determined and slow—not too sure, though, we have, however, no space to refer to the long story of the clashings of interests and conflicts of opinion, of the bitter controversies and wordy warfare that raged from time to time; ultimately it was a story of the victory of a lofty Ideal and high principles, of the triumph of a single personality, of his stubborn resolution and untiring energies, of his immense resourcefulness and his unique patriotism.*

A University, in the present day acceptance of the term, presupposes adequate funds and freedom, to live on and thrive with. A University to be worth the name, must be a centre of intellectual activities, 'an Institution for the acquisition, conservation, refinement and distribution of knowledge'; it must provide for advanced study and systematic research—it must through, its highest departments, supply the nation with its future leaders of thought and action and train the best intellect in its youth; above all, it must, through its professoriate and students, advance the bounds of knowledge

* "...Let us pay homage to the man who above all else, in the eyes of his countrymen and in the eyes of the world, represented the University so completely that for many years Sir Asutosh was in fact the University and the University was Sir Asutosh. As Louis XIV could say "L'et at c'est moi," with equal truth could Sir Asutosh have said, "I am the University."—Lord Lytton, in his presidential speech at the condolence meeting of the Senate.



and broaden the horizon of Truth; for these noble and lofty purposes it must have an eminent and devoted staff of teachers and must give every facility and encouragement to its students; it must also have freedom to fulfil its Ideal—freedom to develop its activities and extend its functions. But the Calcutta University, as it was reshaped and reconstructed under the Indian Universities Act, had neither sufficient funds at its disposal, nor the requisite freedom of development. The custodians of public funds pursued a very niggardly policy towards it, turning a deaf ear to its repeated requests for adequate grants. And the few doles that were meted out to it from time to time were absolutely insufficient for any expansion and development worth the name. As for freedom, the less is spoken the better; we have, the testimony of Dr. Sadler's Commission that there is 'far too much detailed Government intervention', and as Sir Sankaran Nair referred to in a Minute* of his, 'even such a University is under the unduly rigid control of the Government'. The fact that eighty per cent of the Fellows of the University are nominated by the head of the Government—who is also its virtual head—speaks for itself, it was one of the principal provisions of the Act of 1904; and it enacted that "the University shall be and

* Sir Sankaran Nair's Minute of Dissent to the Despatch of the Government of India to the Secretary of State (16-4-19).

... "University itself is an officialised body under Government control"...



shall be deemed to have been incorporated for the purpose of making provision for the instruction of students with power to appoint University Professors" etc. And the exalted author of the Act—Lord Curzon—also solemnly declared that "the ideal University in India...should be amply and nobly housed, it should be well equipped and it shall be handsomely endowed"*...But the mere act of the legislature or the shadow of it that existed in India at the time—the mere passage of the Indian Universities Bill into an Act did not call into being by a stroke of Vicerigal pen or by waving a magician's wand the 'ideal' Universities in India. And no one not even their worst critics can accuse the Governments in India—the custodians of public funds—of any overmastering practical sympathy or unduly generous financial support or an unseemly anxiety in the matter of the transformation of the Universities of India from 'examining and degree-giving' bodies into Institutions "where all knowledge is taught by the best teachers,...where all knowledge so taught is turned to good purpose and where its boundaries are receiving constant expansion."* And if one University in India has been approaching the realization of this ideal and has been coming up to the standard contemplated by the Act, if it has won a honoured position

* Lord Curzon's Convocation Address at Calcutta University, 1904.



in the republic of letters and science, if it has achieved and maintained a world recognition as a centre of intellectual activities and original thinking, as a home of highest studies and researches, it is not due to any statutory provisions of any Act, or to any exuberance of support or sympathy from official quarters—but due directly to the lifelong labours and sacrifices of a single individual, often acting in direct opposition of the powers that be.

As we have already referred to, two years after the passage of the Indian Universities Act Asutosh was appointed to the office of the Vice-Chancellor in 1906 and the first year of his administration synchronised with the promulgation of the new body of Regulations framed under the Act. But this stage, as the Government of India rightly pointed out, "was the starting point of a gradual process of reconstruction; the Regulations fill in the frame work supplied by the Universities Act; they provide the machinery for reform." It will be impossible within the limited space at our disposal to dwell at length upon this 'gradual process' of reconstruction and 'reform'. Asutosh was now determined to realize his great Ideal and fulfil his cherished dream of reviving the glories of Nalanda and Vicramsila—he was bent upon making his 'alma mater' an instrument of the intellectual regeneration of his countrymen; the task that confronted him at once called forth the best qualities of a shrewd and firm administrator, a courageous



reformer, a farseeing statesman and a profound idealist and patriot. As he himself declared in 1914—“...It would be difficult, hardly possible in fact to characterise in one brief sentence, all the demands made by the Indian Universities Act upon the Universities—thorough reorganization, reform, revolution, each of these words, would in a way be justified but would express one aspect only...” But these demands—though tremendous and multifarious—were made upon one who was literally a host in himself, one who was, above all, an intellectual giant and a hero of action, one who rose equal to his office; and the task was accomplished after years of protracted struggles and turmoils, ceaseless labours and prolonged trials.

The actual reforms and innovations, the constructions or the ‘new creations’ that Asutosh carried out in the University fall under three main heads—Letters, Science and Law. But simply reconstructing the University or building newer and newer structures therein would have been fruitless, without strengthening and improving the sources which were and which are to supply the materials and ingredients—without bettering the conditions and system of school education. Besides, the new Act conferred upon the University considerable powers of control and supervision over the schools; indeed the University was under statutory obligation to bring its affiliated institutions up to the line contemplated by the Act—and most of these latter were the



subject matter of severe criticism and condemnation in the Report of the Lord Curzon's Commission as well as on the floor of the Council Chamber. The task was no light one—it was moreover a thankless task; it consisted in instituting a searching enquiry into the conditions of seven hundred schools scattered all over Western and Eastern Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, Assam and Burma, and in undertaking a survey of the condition of its affiliated colleges sixty in number—also equally scattered. The conditions of most of these institutions were indeed far from satisfactory; “They are” pointed out Asutosh, “without exception under-manned; of libraries and laboratories, there are only few which can satisfactorily stand the scrutiny of the most reasonable test.” Regular inspection and systematic vigilance resulted in raising of the general efficiency and brought about many improvements in these institutions, but some of the colleges had their scope restricted, — of course—not without considerable correspondence and controversy, so as to concentrate their energies and attention on the subjects they were best, and not least, qualified to teach. On the whole, Asutosh's efforts from his place in the University, bore fruit and the institutions awake to a new life and became alive to new ideals and new ideas which were aboard and which found an eloquent exponent and faithful champion in Asutosh.

The expansion of the functions of the University



in the Faculty of Law—which resulted in the establishment of University Law College—has an interesting history. The University was, as we have seen, an examining body and did not undertake any teaching either in Law or in any other subject; and there were no less than 18 or 19 colleges in and outside Calcutta, that enjoyed the privilege of teaching Law; upto 1880, the Government Colleges only had attached Law classes; in 1882, the Metropolitan Institution obtained affiliation in Law; then many other colleges followed suit. "It is a noteworthy fact" wrote Asutosh, tracing the history of the University Law College, "that we have not got any single college devoted entirely to the study of Law, as we have in the cases of Medicine and Engineering.....as regards efficiency of these institutions...only one opinion is possible. They are nowhere near the mark...No college has got a good Library or a sufficient number of efficient teachers. No attempt is made to enforce discipline among students." The Education Departments of the Governments of Bengal and of Eastern Bengal and Assam realized this unsatisfactory state of things and in almost all the Government and private colleges, law classes were closed. The solution of the problem of legal education seemed to Asutosh, "to close all Law classes, and for the University, to found a Law College like the Law Colleges in Madras, Bombay and Allahabad." Hence in July 1908, on the



motion of the Vice-Chancellor (Asutosh), the Senate, unanimously resolved to establish a University Law College; with sanction of the Governor-General in Council, the University Law College was started with effect from July 1909. This is, in the barest outline, an account of his reform of legal education imparted under the University.

The history of the developments and expansions of activities of the University in the domains of Letters and Science is a long and checkered one; we can only attempt a barest and briefest outline. With the exception of the Tagore Professorship of Law (established in the early sixties of the last century), the University had had no Professorships of its own and had, as we said earlier no teaching functions—the definite provisions of the new Act and the elaborate Regulations notwithstanding. On the suggestion of Mr. Justice Mookerjee, the Vice-Chancellor, the Government of India established the Minto Professorship of Economics, the first in the field. The duty of the Professor—it was settled—was to devote himself to the Science of Economics and its application to Indian Problems and to deliver a course of not less than six lectures. The King George V Professorship of Mental and Moral Philosophy and Hardinge Professorship of Higher Mathematics were next sanctioned by the Government of India (on the suggestion of the University) to commemorate the visit of the King Emperor. In 1912 the Carmaichael Professorship of Ancient Indian



History and Culture as well as two other Professorships in English and Comparative Philology, were instituted. Thanks to the magnetic personality and persuasive powers of Asutosh, the University was able to secure very well-known and eminent scholars for these appointments. Messrs. Monohar Lall and Hamilton (Economics), B. N. Seal and S. Radhakrishnan (Philosophy), Young and Cullis (Mathematics), Henry Stephen (English) and Otto Strauss (Comparative Philology) were the first Professors. Besides these, two Fellowships of a permanent nature were created to carry on original research work with a view to promote the 'advancement of learning.' Ram Tanu Lahiri Research Fellowship was created out of the income of a fund made over by the son of the respected educationist, Mr. S. K. Lahiri. The duties of the Fellow are to investigate the history of Bengalee Language and Literature. Mr. Dinesh Ch. Sen has all along been appointed to this Fellowship. The duties of the Sree Gopal Mullick Fellowship—as the other one is called—are mainly to deliver a course of lectures on Vedanta Philosophy and its place in the Philosophical systems of the world and also to carry on research work in this direction.

The Act of Incorporation which, as Asutosh had pointed out, was not quite clear as to the means or agencies by and through which the students were to be proficient before they could be tested by the examinations of the University and then rewarded



with its 'academical degrees'; unlike the Act of Incorporation which tacitly assumed affiliated colleges, the Indian Universities Act, firstly, deals clearly with, the colleges affiliated to, and are regarded as teaching agencies, under the University; then it empowers the University, and stresses its obligation, to take up teaching functions of its own through its professors and lecturers appointed for the purpose and 'to do all acts...which tend to the promotion of study and research.' But if both the University and its colleges were to carry on teaching functions, they must divide between them, the totality of teaching work—the latter teaching up to a certain stage and the former, the higher body, taking up all instruction and teaching, beyond and above it, as well as most of the real advancement of learning and research work, original thinking and intellectual activities with a view to fulfil its highest task—the contribution to the sumtotal of human knowledge and extension of the horizon of Truth.

We have already said that one of the effects of the new Regulations coming into force was this that most of the colleges had the scope of their activities restricted, and in consequence, the Post-Graduate classes therein had to be closed. But provisions had to be made for higher studies and researches somewhere else. There were, however, on the staff of some of the colleges, men who were fitly qualified to take up Post-Graduate Teaching in some



subjects or other ; on the otherhand there was an ever increasing stream of earnest and advanced students—many of them, brilliant graduates and earnest scholars—ready and anxious to take up highest studies and research. The constructive genius and the fertile brain of Asutosh were quick to take what advantage they could, of the prevailing conditions and he was not slow to conceive and work out the plan that he translated into action. It occurred to him—and he decided to do it—to combine in groups, all those eminently qualified teachers, on the staff of the various Calcutta Colleges, who were quite fit for Post-Graduate work ; so each of these groups was, collectively and individually, capable of undertaking Post-Graduate Teaching in some branch or other. These groups of teachers—whose part-time services were lent to the University by their respective Colleges—were further strengthened by wholetime Lecturers, belonging not to any of the colleges but solely to the University, from which, the latter received full, and the former, proportionate, remunerations. Besides these, there were University Professors and Readers in various subjects. The Readers are generally eminent scholars and learned men, appointed for comparatively short periods, to deliver certain courses of lectures in special subjects, mainly for the benefit of advanced students and highly educated people. The University Professors are as a matter of course, appointed for longer periods to deliver lectures,



on a synthetic plan and remain in constant contact with best student in each department"; moreover, the highest teaching in each branch would be taken up by them; they are also 'to superintend the work of the University Lecturers' in their department. It will be clear that the Professors are thus to guide and be engaged in the highest and most important activities of the University in the domain of the advancement of learning and research.

The progress of scientific education and the promotion of higher studies and research in science in Bengal has an interesting history; long before the magnificent College of Science of the Calcutta University was planned and established by Asutosh, the cause of scientific education and research in our country found an ardent and indifatigable champion in that illustrious countryman of ours—the late lamented Dr Mohendra Lall Sircar, C.I.E., D.L., M.D.; Dr. Sircar was not only a great pioneer in the field of scientific education, but a brilliant scholar and an enthusiastic worker; he advanced the cause of higher study and research in Bengal by devoting a whole lifetime of earnest effort, persistent struggle and striking sacrifice, at a time when "the value of scientific education was not sufficiently understood in India" The Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science which he founded and which owed its existence and its prosperity to his lifelong endeavour and untiring energy 'is the oldest institution in India



devoted exclusively to the cultivation of Physical Sciences'; and the Association not only lived but thrived; it has been long developing and expanding its activities; the investigations and research works carried on here has been widely published and appreciated; it has also been contributing numerous papers to the scientific journals of the world; it has given India one of the well-known scientists of the day—Dr. C. V. Raman. Thus it has really been the precursor of the University College of Science and thus the ground of Asutosh was thoroughly prepared by the pioneer works of the high souled Dr. Sircar.

Besides this institution, there was no other college in Bengal wholly devoted to science, though St. Xaviers and Presidency Colleges afforded facilities for scientific education. The new Act, however called upon the University to appoint University Professors in Science—as well as in Arts—and to erect, equip and maintain University Laboratory, Museums and 'in general to take whatever steps may be conducive to the furtherance of learning and research'. Himself an enthusiastic devotee of science, a reputed scientific scholar and an earnest research worker from his early youth, Asutosh dreamt the dream of his alma mater providing ample facilities for scientific study and research; he was even 'enraptured' by it, though the University was as yet far from attempting the realization of the ideal. But Asutosh was not merely a dreamer of dreams—



not simply a dreamy idealist. He was determined to work for, and bring about, the fulfilment of this dream of his youth and the ambition of his manhood. As he himself eloquently said in 1922, "It was in my deepest conviction that science had unfettered the mind and enthroned reason...and brought to mankind the message of intellectual enlightenment and liberty that I planned the foundation of the University College of Science and approached for the fulfilment of my cherished ambition, two of the noblest sons of India—Sir Tarak Nath Palit and Sir Rash Behari Ghosh. With a generosity which has no parallel in the history of education in British India, they gave away their wealth...the savings of lifelong toil as members of legal profession..." These eloquent words contain, in a nutshell, the history of the University College of Science and Technology which has added to the beauties of Calcutta and to the glories of India in the intellectual world abroad.

It is a truism to state that the development and expansions of a University worth the name, mean large capital outlay and considerable recurring expenditure; in the normal circumstances it is mainly the state in a modern democratic country, which comes forward to discharge its natural obligation in regard to education; for education is a matter of vital importance as much to the state as to the individual. But in India, the passage of the Indian Universities Act was not followed by



any dramatic or automatic transformation of the University; it was reserved for Asutosh to work and fight every stage of the transformation; he imposed upon himself the gigantic task of initiating all reforms and innovations—as also of finding the ways and means for their progress. And for the magnificent endowments of Sir Tarak Nath Palit and Sir Rash Behari Ghosh which were the immediate cause and main factor in the establishment of the University College of Science - we have mainly to thank Asutosh. On the 15th June 1912 Sir Tarak Nath Palit made over to the University, by a trust deed, money and land worth seven lacs, for the promotion of scientific and technical education and cultivation and advancement of science in Bengal, and for the purpose of foundation of a University College of Science and Technology. The conditions were: I. The University to found two Chairs, one of Chemistry and the other of Physics. II. The Chairs to be filled by Indians born of Indian parents. III. The University (from its own funds), to provide suitable Lecture rooms, Laboratories, Libraries, Museums, workshops and other facilities for teaching and research and to erect, on the site of premises No. 92 Upper Circular Road, such structures. A few months afterwards—on the 8th October—Sir T. N. Palit made over to the University, subject only to his life interest, another seven lacs in money and land for the purposes, and on the conditions mentioned above—the only reservation being that



the University was to set apart one lac and apply the income for the benefit of advanced students in science, enabling them to carry on researches or investigation abroad, that is, outside India.

In the interval of these two epoch-making gifts, the University approached the Government of India for substantial financial help to carry out the objects of Palit endowment; but the latter, though repeatedly asked and urged, refused to recognise their obligations to, and come to the rescue of, the University, in the momentous question of the establishment and equipment of the College of Science; they only permitted the University to apply Rs. 12,000 out of the total annual grant of Rs. 65,000, to this purpose and said * that the representations of the Calcutta University would be considered along with the claims of other institutions. Committed to the establishment of the College of Science when they accepted the Palit endowment, Asutosh had to reconsider and cut short the original, plans and estimates; but nothing

* The Government's replies to the University's appeals for help in connection with the College of Science, were characteristic. "The requests of the Calcutta University will receive consideration in conjunction with the claims of other Universities and other branches of education...". "When funds are available, the request of the University for further grants for higher teaching will be considered in conjunctions with other demands".—The Government of India's letters dated 14th January 1913 and 23rd December 1913, respectively.



daunted by the Government's indifference, he proceeded with his noble work.

In the meantime, another epoch-making event in the history of this great institution took place, thanks to the sagacity and resourcefulness of Asutosh. This was unique gift of Rs. 10.00.000 made over by Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh to the University to found four Chairs and eight Research Studentships, and to properly maintain the laboratory, in the College of Science. Dr. Ghosh's stipulations were :—one Chair for each of the following subjects: (a) Applied Mathematics, (b) Physics, (c) Chemistry and (d) Botany with special reference to Agriculture. The duties of the Professors are to carry on original research with a view to extend the bounds of knowledge and to improve, by the application of their researches, the Arts, Industries, Manufactures, and Agricultures of this country, (b) to stimulate and guide research by advanced students and...to foster the growth of learning... two studentships were to be attached to each Professor to carry on investigation under his guidance and generally to assist him ...that the Chairs be always filled by Indians (born of Indian parents). Apart from the magnificent character of this gift—unique in the annals of University education in India—it came at the psychological moment when the University was in great difficulty, owing to the refusal of state help, in carrying out the accepted programme of Palit Trust Deed.



And the appointments to these Professorships were the very best that could be possibly made in India—we have to thank Asutosh for the services of eminent scientists, which he was able to secure for the University. To Palit Chairs of Chemistry and Physics were called two of the most renowned and respected scholars whose names have become household words through the length and breadth of India and whose fame has also spread abroad—Dr. P. C. Roy, and Dr. C. V. Raman. And to the Ghosh Chairs of applied Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics and Botany, were appointed Dr. Ganes Prosad, Dr. P. C. Mitter, Mr. Debendra Mohun Bose and Mr. S. P. Agharkar, respectably, all of whom were reputed scholars, well-known for their researches and learning.

Besides these developments and expansions of the functions of the University which marked its transformation—thanks to Asutosh's constructive genius and untiring industry—into a home of higher teaching and culture, the cause of highest study and research, of original thinking and intellectual activities received a great impetus at his hands—by his institution of Readerships in the University, and he was able to procure the services of distinguished Readers, "each an acknowledged master in his own special department and an unfailing source of inspiration to the genuine students". And it was mainly due to his fame as a versatile scholar and profound student, as a great



jurist and prominent mathematician that he was able to induce and attract to his University—for the first time not only in its history but also in the history of higher education in British India—such a galaxy of distinguished scholars and savants, thinkers and scientists of international fame and belonging to all countries of the world. Thus was he able not only to raise his country and his University in the estimation of intellectual world abroad, but also to draw India in the mid currents of world thought and to turn his alma mater into a confluence and centre of world culture and world scholarship. Dr. Sir Paul Vinogradoff, one of the greatest jurists and thinkers of our age, who stood, in the words of Asutosh, 'in the foremost rank of investigators in historical jurisprudence' was the University Reader on the very interesting subject, 'Kinship in Early Law.' Dr. Hermann Jacobi, 'one of the leading European Sanskritists of the present generation' delivered a course of lectures on the 'History and Development of Indian Alankar'—a subject on which he is acknowledged to be the greatest living authority among Western Scholars. Dr. Lylvain Levi who is, 'one of the most distinguished of the present generation of French orientalists and has invaded every conceivable corner in the domain of Oriental studies' ...gave, as our University Reader, a course of lectures on the fascinating subjects—'India and her neighbours in Ancient Times'. Prof. Hermann Oldenburgh who is one of the most



eminent orientalists and has a world wide reputation for scholarship, gave at our University, 'a masterly sketch of the method employed and results obtained' in the domain of old Indian grammatical and mythological Research. Dr. Andrew Russel Forsyth who is one of the greatest mathematicians of the day and received the Honorary Degree of Doctor from the Universities of Oxford, Dublin, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Christiania, lectured on 'The Theory of Functions of two Complex Variables.' Among other Readers were the late Mr. J. N. Das Gupta (on Bengal in the sixteenth century); Mr. Finlay Shirrears (on some recent Development in Indian Currency); Mr. Yamakama, a famous Japanese scholar and Mr. J. N. Das Gupta (India, as depicted by the Chinese Travellers and European Travellers, in the seventeenth century, respectably); Mr. Bhandarkar (on Indian Epigraphy), Mr. Dinesh Ch. Sen (on Vaisnab Literature of Mediæval Bengal). Besides these, Asutosh was able to arrange, with the help of Sir Alexander Pedlar, a former Vice-Chancellor the delivery of courses of lectures by a number of scientific men of great eminence. These famous scholars were on their way to Australia and were good enough to accept the invitation of Asutosh to lecture to his University: Mr. H. H. Turner, Savian Professor of Astronomy in the Oxford University Prof. E. W. Brown of Yale University; Mr. H. E. Armstrong Professor of Chemistry in the Imperial



College of Science and Technology, Mr. W. M. Hicks, Professor of Physics in the University of Sheffield and Mr. William Betason, Professor of Physiology in the Royal Institution.

These were, in very brief and bald terms, some of the changes wrought, some of the innovations effected and reforms carried out in the University and in the system of higher education; before he laid down the reins of his onerous and exalted office in 1914—after a protracted tenure—Asutosh might be said to have called fairly into being the great Teaching and Research University at Calcutta which, under his fostering care and inspiring idealism, has all along been expanding and developing its functions and activities. And Asutosh was then amply justified in declaring “that a considerable portion of what we have accomplished may be designed as new creation, that we have planned and carried out what had previously been hardly imagined and certainly not been attempted either here or in any other Indian University.” With these memorable words he brought to a close his great speech which has made the Convocation (of 1914) a memorable event in the annals of the University: “Let us, therefore, advance, the banner of progress in hand, with bold and unwary steps....the rising generation has availed itself with eagerness, nay, enthusiasm, of the opportunities we have created for higher studies, that sparks of new inextinguishable fire



kindled in our midst have already leapt to all parts of India and that sister Universities are eager to emulate and emulate what we have boldly initiated. I feel that a mighty spirit has been aroused, a spirit that will not be quenched, and this conviction is a deep comfort to me when I take leave from work dear to me for so many weighty reasons." He ended with a fervent prayer "for the perennial welfare of our alma mater—and of that greater parental divinity to whom even our great University is a mere hand maid as it were—my beloved Mother land."

The seven years' interval between Asutosh's first retirement from, and second assumption of, the office of Vice-Chancellorship, witnessed many important events in the history of higher education in Bengal, nay even, in India; the most significant of these was, of course, the labours of the Calcutta University Commission, appointed by Lord Chelmsford's Government with the object of investigating the whole problem, and improving the entire system, of higher education imparted under the auspices of the Calcutta University. The Commission which included eminent scholars and educationists of England and India such as Messrs—Gregory, Ramsay Muir, Hartog, Sir Asutosh and Dr. Zebuddin Ahmed of Aligarh, laboured for nearly two years, visiting every centre of higher study and education through the length and breadth of India; the report—which was unanimous—was as elaborate as the enquiry



was thorough, and left nothing to be desired but threw light on every topic and every question of educational policy and programme. It will be quite beyond our limited scope to dwell at length, on the Report of the Commission or to emphasise the importance and necessity of its recommendations; we shall briefly refer to it later on. But before the Commission laboured, another very important Committee worked and reported. The Government of India appointed a strong Committee to advise them as to the best way of consolidating the Post-Graduate studies in the Calcutta University; this Committee was presided over by Asutosh, and included, among others, Drs. P. C. Roy, B. N. Seal, Messrs. Hamilton, Howell, Hornell, Wordsworth. The Report of the Committee, thanks to Asutosh's personality, to his powers of persuasion and his masterly presentation of his case, was unanimous and it presented 'an elaborate scheme of reconstruction,' which was approved both by the Government of India and the Rector—Lord Carmaichael. The Senate, after a protracted debate, framed Regulations, to translate into execution, the scheme and the principles formulated in the Report of the Committee; after their approval by Lord Ronaldshay, the Regulations were finally sanctioned by the Government of India (on the 26th June 1917) for the Post-Graduate Teaching in various subjects in Arts and Sciences.

As was pointed out by Lord Ronaldshay, these



Regulations marked an 'important land mark' in the history of higher education in Bengal; we have already seen that the Indian Universities Act and the Regulations framed thereunder, aimed at the transformation of a purely 'examining body' into a home of highest studies and researches, and the scheme and the Regulations now sanctioned marked this definite change; in consequence of these, the Post-Graduate Councils in Arts and Science came into being and are composed of all the University teachers, four members of the Senate and all the heads of First-grade Colleges; the management and organization of the Post-Graduate teaching and research were entrusted to these Councils, which have the privilege to elect its own President and its own Executive Committee, and the latter, its own Chairman; besides these, Boards of higher studies were also created for particular subjects of studies, to deal with academic matters of the subjects concerned; and as we have said more than once, Asutosh was elected, from the very beginning, to the Presidentship of these Councils as well as to the Chairmanship of these Executive Committees, and to most of the Boards of Higher studies, as well.

But before Asutosh was called again to the exalted office in 1921, many momentous events occurred; one which is of supreme importance to the progress and prosperity, development and expansions of the University,—specially in the



domain of Science—was another munificent gift of Rs. 11.43.000 by Sir Rash Behari Ghosh. As Mr. S. R. Das once pointed out,* directly or indirectly or both, Asutosh was a powerful factor in this and similar other magnificent donations. 'This sum will be held by the University as an integral part of the original gift' and only new conditions were that two new Chairs (one for Applied Chemistry and the other for Applied Physics) were to be established. Two other similar events took place which went a long way to advance the cause of higher study and research. By his last will and testament (dated 22-5-20), Sir Rash Behari, made over to the University, another sum of Rs. 2.50 000 for the purpose of founding three annual Fellowships (two of which, must be devoted to scientific subjects). The duties of the Fellows are to investigate educational methods abroad in their special branches of study or to undertake Research in any special branch of learning. The other event was the remarkable gift of Rs. 5.50.000 by Kumar Guroo Prosad Sing of Khaira for the promotion of higher study in Arts and in Science. So large a hand had Asutosh in this gift, that the donor left him entirely

* Referring to his tragic death, Mr. S. R. Das, Advocate General, said, in the course of his tribute in the presence of all the Judges assembled in Chief Justice's room :—"... It was due to his persuasive eloquence and his great work* at the University, that the late Sir Tarak Nath Palit and the late Sir Rash Behari Ghosh were induced to make such munificent donations to the Science College attached to the University."



free to formulate and work any suitable scheme he might think fit. Mention must also be made to two other donations which resulted in the institutions of systematic lectures. Babu G. C. Ghosh gave away one lac of rupees to found the 'Stephanos Nirmalendu Ghosh Lectures' (quinquennially) in Comparative Religion. Lastly, Asutosh, himself, made over Rs. 40,000 to found an annual course of lectures—called after his dear departed daughter, Kamala Lectures—in some aspects of Indian Life and Thought.

But these unheard-of expansions, reforms and developments notwithstanding, the University was to pass through a series of crisis: leakage of question papers, establishment of new Universities curtailing its jurisdiction and financial resources, the end of the great War which shattered the financial stability of the Governments, the inauguration of the Reforms which put a financial millstone round Bengal's neck and lastly, the great Non-co-operation Movement which swayed the youths and the students of the country and 'shook their faith in established law and order and like a whirlwind swept them away from the peaceful avocations of the scholars'. At such a critical juncture, to 'shoulder the responsibility and management of a great University, steadily expanding and developing, was a manifestly hazardous adventure' indeed, but Asutosh courageously launched upon it, he was attracted to it, mainly because—as



he aptly said—‘the greater the peril of the task, the more attractive the performance of the duty.’ So once more he was offered the Vice-Chancellorship by Lord Ronaldshay, with the concurrence of Lord Chelmsford; and though it was ‘the greatest surprise of his life’—for he finally took leave from ‘work dear to me for so many weighty reasons’—he accepted the offer; and he was under no illusion that it would be a bed of roses.

Asutosh’s activities in this second tenure of his Vice-Chancellorship have two aspects—destructive and constructive. In the first year, so long as Lord Ronaldshay, a distinguished scholar himself, was in Bengal as Rector or Chancellor of the University, there was no trouble and from his place as the business head of the University as well as its academic head—the President of both the Councils Post Graduate Teaching in Arts and Science—Asutosh was left free to devote all his constructive abilities and energies to consolidating, harmonising and strengthening the various branches of studies and researches opened in the University. But the financial position of the University was steadily going from bad to worse; apart from the blow dealt by the Non-co-operation Movement and the loss due to the establishment of other Universities restricting its jurisdiction, the unprecedented expansions of the University and the working of the various departments of higher studies, with efficient and even brilliant staff, meant a large recurring



expenditure—beyond its own limited resources. It is a truism to state that the developments and activities of a renovated University like Calcutta's were and are bound up with the real progress and prosperity of the nation ; the former has a right to substantial help from 'the custodians of public funds,' a right to be 'amply and nobly housed...well equipped and handsomely endowed.*' But the atmosphere and mentality of the Government in Bengal—so far as the Calcutta University was concerned—underwent a radical change with the assumption of office by Lord Lytton. Instead of coming to the rescue of the University and recognising and acting up to their duty and obligation to it, the Government and their supporters in the Legislative Council stiffened their attitude and were determined to take advantage of the grave financial crises of the University, to curtail its limited autonomy, integrity and initiative—to restrict the power and influence of Asutosh therein—and to bring it under more effective official control—by legislative enactment. Now ensued a bitter controversy, a desperate conflict between the all-powerful Government, naturally the masters of the situation, and an individual citizen and an institution, both under the former.

We have no space, nor any intention, to go into the details of the virulent controversy, that raged

*Lord Curzon's Convocation Address at the Calcutta University, 1904.



round the vexed question of University Reform; it is no doubt true that the constitution of the University under the Act of 1904 was long out of date and against the spirit of the times, against the spirit of the Reformed Constitution of the country. But even this obsolete Act and the various Regulations framed thereunder—specially those following the Report of Post-Graduate Consolidation Committee of 1916—allowed some autonomy in the internal and academic affairs. But both the Government and their supporters in the legislature wanted to tighten the grip of the Government over, and aimed at taking away the limited autonomy of, the University; all of them wanted to curb the influence, and end the ascendancy of Asutosh who completely dominated both the academic as well as the administrative sides of the University. The financial crisis that faced the University assumed such grave proportions, owing to the indifference and unreasonableness of the Government refusing to come to its rescue, that nothing short of closing its various departments of studies and researches was the imminent fact. On the other hand, three distinct and definite attempts at retrogressive legislation were made; the Government themselves drafted a Bill which never saw the light of day, though it was confidentially circulated to the Senators. Both the Governor and his 'responsible' Minister were prime movers in this direction; two prominent members of Bengal Council were responsible for two



reactionary Bills; Mr. S. N. Mullick's Bill provided for a Board of Accounts and a Treasurer who was to be something like an Accountant-General; it also aimed at a Senate mainly elected from various constituencies; Mr. J. N. Basu's Bill provided for a Senate also mainly elected on a purely communal principle with a reservation of seats for Mahomedans. But both the Bills sought to revive the Rector and to give the Minister this dignified office, making him practically supreme in all matters of the University, internal, academic or administrative.

'Ditcher' referred thus to these Bills, in the 'Capital.'—"The two reformers referred to—Mr. S. N. Mullick and Mr. J. N. Basu both of whom would make the Minister of Education Rector of the Calcutta University with power to control the Senate with his heart's desire which may take the form of putting his pigmy knife into the calf of a giant Vice-Chancellor of transcendent worth." Both the Bills aimed at making the Minister supreme in the constitution and administration of the University. Those were the days of Non-co-operation and the Legislative Council was clean packed with loyalists and constitutionalists; and the Government always commanded a large majority therein; so the situation was desperate from the University point of view; but, happily, public opinion was thoroughly roused against the reactionary proposals; and even the veteran educationist and renowned scientist, Dr. P. C. Roy—who could never be accused



of any undue partiality towards Asutosh—left his test-tube and raised his emphatic voice against the subversive movement to 'reform' the University 'out of existence'. Happily for University and Asutosh, the greatest source of support and strength came from the most authentic, authoritative and independent quarters—from the Reports of the Royal Commission on the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in England, of the Sadler Commission, as well as from independent administrators and rulers; in India. "If there were any danger" the Commissioners tersely declared in England, 'that grants of public money would lead to State interference with opinion in the Universities, it might be the less of the two evils that they should decline in efficiency rather than lose their independence in order to obtain adequate means.' In the course of his Address to the Allahabad University, Sir Harcourt Butler said, "... There is one matter which causes me some little apprehension, namely, a tendency to interfere with the freedom and initiative of the University from outside. I am impressed by the consideration that any undue interference with the University will militate against the future development not only of the University but also of the province..." Sir Reginald Craddock, First Chancellor of Rangoon University said in the course of a speech in 1922, "... Any such pressure (from official quarters, to 'invade the independence of the Senate,' or 'to



starve the University and the constituent Colleges') would have to be stoutly resisted by the University itself, as indeed by all citizens in Burma who prefer the genuine to the sham and are not to be imposed upon by falacious ideals of national welfare. A University so enchained will be a body without a soul..." It is not quite well-known—but it is a fact—that the Governor of Assam, the Hon'ble Member of the Governor-General's Executive Council, in charge of Education, and the Hon'ble Minister and Director of Public Instruction, Assam, (who are, all of them, Fellows) were won over by Asutosh;—at any rate they did not support the official and non-official Bills intended to limit the autonomy of the University.

But the monumental Report of the Sadler Commission brought the greatest succour to the hands of Asutosh; in this Report which was the result of protracted deliberations, and of a most shifting enquiry and prolonged tour, the Commissioners sought to preserve the autonomy and integrity of the University as well as to recognise the 'demands of the democratic principle' by proposing the creation of an Academic Council to deal independently with the academic affairs and educational matters, as also of a Court to be the supreme body of the University largely composed of elected members, representative of every shade of opinion and interest in the country and 'vested with extensive legislative and financial functions in the adminis-



tration of the University,' and the connecting link between the two was to be an Executive Council entrusted with the management of financial and administrative affairs; besides, there was to be a Board of Secondary Education. Various Universities in India took advantage of the constructive proposals of the Commission and carried out the contemplated reforms into their structure; but nothing was done in the Calcutta University—the very University for whose benefit the Commission was appointed. The numerous critics of Asutosh and the newly awakened 'reformers' left the elaborate and illuminating Report severely alone and applied their own 'surplus virgin minds'—to use Sir A. Choudhuri's pithy words—to the glorious work of reformation, without caring at all for the recognized authorities and advanced and accepted thought (in progressive countries) in educational matters. It will be beyond our scope to dwell at length on this most critical juncture in the history of higher education in Bengal, but the fact remained that in spite of their immense resources, unlimited power and natural vantage position as the custodians of public funds, the official reformers had to curb down their reforming zeal; the fact was that the reactionary forces that gathered round the official standard, the ominous clouds that threatened to destroy the independence and integrity of the University and sap the foundation and structure of the sacred Temple of Knowledge and Learning,



were routed by the sturdy independence, indomitable courage and heroic stand of Asutosh. It is this fight, this noble stand and the 'tiger' qualities displayed by him which won him the striking tribute from the greatest thinker-poet of our age; Tagore, said in course of his 'tribute of appreciation' ".....Asutosh heroically fought against heavy odds for winning freedom for our education .."

Apart from his stubborn and unbending attitude and desperate fight that he had to put up all along, three of his feats stand out in broad relief, as they contributed a good deal to his hard-fought victory. One was a unique utterance of his in the Senate when the University was faced with bankruptcy and starvation, in which he enunciated the glorious doctrine of 'freedom first, freedom second and freedom always', and avowed that he would go abegging from door to door, like the 'rishis' of old, rather than surrender the birth-right of the University; as Dr. Sylvain Levi says, 'Never did Sir Asutosh rise to greater heights than at this crisis'. Next was his brilliant and bold Convocation Address of 1922; in this heroic utterance of his, he mercilessly exposed the utter hollowness of the preposterous pretensions of the 'reformers' and justified his standpoint by referring to the highest educational and administrative authorities and ended with a peroration that will live for ever in the annals of his country's freedom. "We can not shut our eyes to the facts" declared he boldly, in the immediate presence of the Governor



and the Ministers and other reformers, "that there have been abundant indications of what looks like a determined conspiracy to bring the University into disesteem and discredit. A satirist, gifted with uncommon sense of humour, recently classified the members of this confideracy as political adventurers, academic imposters and sanctimonious critics. I can not vouch for the logical accuracy of this classification, much less for its completeness... They appear to have discovered from the depths of their inner consciousness and without adequate knowledge of the academic affairs in other parts of the civilized world that our activities have been developed on an extravagant scale"*. But perhaps his greatest contribution to this fight for 'freedom for our education,' his most remarkable stand in the unequal battle to win independence for our academic life and thought was his historic letter to Lord Lytton, in which he sternly refused the Governor's 'insulting offer' of Vice-Chancellorship, which is unique and unparalleled

*"A Convocation speech by Sir Asutosh Mookerjee is not an accident or an episode, but an event in the educational development and progress of India. In the present crisis through which Calcutta University is passing one looks to him for a diagnosis of unimpeachable accuracy; for a prognosis of confident reliability. He did not disappoint us on Saturday; on the contrary he exceeded our expectations. He stood up four-square in moral and intellectual grandeur to answer the criticism concentrated upon him...and only the intellectually dishonest could fail to be wholly responsive to his candour of soul and plenary vision of life....."—'The Capital' dated 21th March, 1923.



in the history of British rule in India and will hand down his name to the generations and generations to come, as a fearless patriot, as a scrupulous guardian of the highest honour and best interests of the nation above all, as a 'man' 'who can speak and act fearlessly according to his convictions'...After this manly refusal Mr. Bhupendra Nath Basu was appointed to be his successor. Mr. Basu, an old Senator and a veteran public man and statesman, showed no indication to trifle with the integrity of his 'alm mater', but brought an open mind to bear on his arduous task. Unfortunately he could not continue long in office and died shortly after. He was succeeded by one of Asutosh's colleagues on the Bench—Sir Ewert Greaves. But Sir Ewert proved a Tartar and strictly followed in Asutosh's footsteps; holding fast to his Ideal, he strikingly upheld the best of traditions of Asutosh and stoutly fought for the independence, and welfare of the University. Thus the Damocles' sword hanging over the University was withdrawn.

It is a welcome relief to turn from the sickening trends and tendencies of the unhappy controversy to the brighter and better aspects of his achievements; if we have to bid goodbye to the unflinching and invincible fighter and the bold and skillful strategist, we have to deal with the statesman, the patriot and the reformer in the realm of education. Looking back after the lapse of some years, it seems a real miracle, an unfathomable mystery that the man

who fought so desperately, and with such super-human skill and courage, with such tireless energy and endurance, brought to a successful close, the unequal fight with the Governor, the Minister and the Legislature, could, during the same period, leave such a remarkable record of constructive activities and striking achievements. And the engulfing conflicts and bitter controversies notwithstanding, there was no lessening of the stirrings of new life called into being, no waning of the new spirit breathed, no slackening of the new energy infused by Asutosh into the 'steel framework' of the University; so that Prof James Wilford Garner of the University of Illinois and a scholar of international fame, delivered, at the University, a course of brilliant lectures, on the Development of International Law; the well-known Prof. Arther Antony Macdonnell of Oxford, delivered, as the first Stephenos Nirmalendu Ghosh Lecturer, a course of lectures, on 'Comparative Religion'; Dr. Stella Kramrisch discoursed on Indian Arts, its contact with Arts of other civilizations and its place in the system of Indian Æsthetics; in this period, too, Sir Kash Behari Ghosh Travelling Fellowships were, for the first time, awarded to the distinguished scholars who went abroad to investigate educational methods and to carry on research in special branches of learning; the Degree of Bachelor of Commerce was first instituted and radical changes were made in the Regulations of the Matriculation Examinations and



the intellectual output of research and original works, also, steadily increased in variety and quality.

In accordance with the new Regulations sanctioned on the 26th June, 1917, the University was called upon to arrange for, and it did undertake, teaching and researches in as many as twenty main branches of knowledge, such as : Sanskrit, Pali, Arabic, Persian, English Indian Vernacular, Comparative Philology, Mental and Moral Philosophy, Pure Mathematics, Applied Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Physiology, Botany, Geology, Zoology, Experimental Psychology, History, Political Economy and Political Philosophy. But to name the subjects is but to understate the truth ; for, each of them is composed of several groups ; in the main department of Sanskrit, for instance, arrangements had have to be made for study and research in nine distinct groups : Literature, Vedas, Law and Science of Interpretation, Vedanta, Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya and Vaishesik, General Philosophy, Prakrit and Epigraphy. Few people realize the magnitude of and possibilities in, the subjects taught ; Asutosh nicely observed, 'truth is that the term Sanskrit, though composed of only eight letters, conotes in the domain of knowledge an empire by itself'. In the departments of Pali—which, in the words of Lord Ronaldshay, cover 'the far-reaching field of Buddhistic studies'—there are provisions for four groups : Literary, Philosophy, Epigraphic and Mohajanic ; in the branch of Islamic studies, facilities exist for



teaching and research in Theosophy, Philosophy, Literature, Rhetoric, Grammar and Science. The Study of Tibetan in an Indian University has an importance all its own; for it is essential for a proper 'reconstruction of the history of Indian civilization during the first thousand years of Christian era; for in this dark period innumerable Sanskrit books were carried into the mountain fastnesses of Tibet and translated by learned Lamas; the originals have disappeared but the translations are still preserved as the 'memorials of Indian civilization'. The late lamented Sjs. Sarat Chandra Das and Satis Chandra Vidyabhusan were the only scholars amongst us who could probe into the mysteries of these studies; the University, with considerable difficulty, was able to make some beginning in this, fascinating subject. Major Campbell, the political officer at Sikkim and a reputed Tibetan scholar, induced the Dalai Luama to send out to the University the Tibetan scholar Geshe Lobzang Targe; but he went back as he could find no one who could discourse with him on equal terms. Thanks, however, to the enterprising zeal of Asutosh, he was subsequently able to secure two scholarly Lamas for the advanced students. The University has, moreover, a splendid collection of Tibetan block prints and manuscripts, the library of the late Mr. Sarat Ch. Das and more than one hundred volumes on various subjects. Closely connected are the study of Chinese and Japanese, for which arrangements have been



made. We need not refer at length to the numerous branches and branches within branches, to the various departments of studies that Asutosh founded in the Calcutta University; let us, however, mention two distinct departments the establishment of which has been his life-long dream, as it is certainly the crowning achievement of his brilliant career as an educational reformer, as an intellectual regenerator, as a constructive statesman and a farseeing patriot of his country: these are the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture and the Department of Indian Vernaculars; in the former, provisions have been made for the study of Vedic and Epic India, political history of Post-Vedic period and the historical geography of Ancient India; optional subjects are Archaeology, Social and Constitutional History, Mathematics and Astronomy, Racial and Anthropographic History; and under the inspiration and able leadership of Asutosh, the University has—immense difficulties (for want of suitable text books) notwithstanding—arranged for teaching and research in such diverse branches of Ancient Indian History as these:—

Indian Epigraphy, Indian Fine Arts, Indian Iconography, Indian Coinage, Indian Palaeography, Indian Architecture, Indian Mathematics, Indian Race Origin, Indian Economic Life, Indian Social Life, Indian Administration, Indian Religion and Indian Astronomy. The departments of vernacular literatures and languages are among the normal features in the life and working of the Universities all the



world over, and it sounds like a paradox that the inauguration of this department should be reckoned as one of his crowning achievements in his triumphant career ; but unfortunately, Indian Vernaculars were relegated to the background in Indian Universities ; Asutosh, as we have seen, fought, so far back as 1892 for the recognition of Bengalee in the University Curriculum ; though baffled on that occasion, he never relaxed his exertions and his zeal for his cause and it was due to his persistent endeavour, his patriotic fervour and his creative imagination, that the Indian vernaculars came into their right place in the premier University in India ; provisions have thus been made for teaching in Bengalee, Hindi, Guzrati, Oriya (principal languages), Assamese, Urdu, Maithali, Telagu, Tamili, Carnarese, Malayan and Sinhalese. And in furtherance of the 'scheme of preparation and publication of typical selections in all the Indian vernaculars from the earliest stages to the modern time' the University brought out splendid volumes, giving specimens from the earliest manuscripts, in Bengalee, Hindi. and Zendavesta. And besides the eight Professorships (in the domain of Science) created with the Palit and Ghosh Endowments, Asutosh founded five more Chairs out of the munificent gifts of Rs. 5.50.000 by Kumar Guru Prosad Sing of Khaira : such as Chairs of Chemistry, Physies, Agriculture, Indian Fine Arts and Indian Linguistics and Phonetics. The University maintains two



Chairs, one for Botany and the other, for Zoology *
As we have already said the Departments of Indian vernacular and of Ancient Indian History and Culture as well as the University College of Science and Technology stand out prominently as the most remarkable of his achievements in the region of intellectual regeneration and educational progress of his country. As he said in 1922 "There is no other University in India where facilities are provided for the cultivation of Indian Vernaculars on so extensive a scale. But let me ask, whether this would have been possible unless the University had a department of Pali which included learned Sinhalese monks, a department of Sanskrit which included a Prakritist professing the Jain religion, a department of Islamic studies which included Persian scholars, a department of Comparative Philology which included a Gazrati scholar, a department of History which included a Mahrati scholar, a department of Economics which included a Telegu scholar, and a department of Anthropology which included a Tamil and Malayan scholar. It is because the University comprises men of high intellectual attainments in so many branches of human knowledge, it is because the University has broken through the barriers of narrow provincialism ..that it has become possible to open the new department of

*Since Asutosh's death, three Chairs have been sanctioned, to be named after him and devoted to some of the subjects, close to his heart—Chairs of Islamic and Oriental Studies and of Mediaeval and Modern Indian History.

Indian Varnaculars... It is the unique triumph of this University that it was the first here or elsewhere to establish a Chair devoted exclusively to the promotion of study and research in Ancient Indian History and Culture and that it was also the first seat of learning where the highest degree in the Faculty of Arts could be earned as a result of competent knowledge of the subject, which must be captivating to all truly patriotic Indians." The supreme importance of this department can hardly be overestimated from the point of view of a proper reconstruction of a fuller and truer history of Ancient India;—specially when, in the face of facts and traditions recently brought to light, so well-known a scholar and author, as the late Mr. Vincent Smith, asserted that India was not suitable for democratic institutions. Even the famous Cambridge History, in the words of Asutosh "has not realized our highest conception of historical work... The time, however, has not yet arrived for undertaking a history of ancient Indian History and Culture from the standpoint of philosophic student of History. Notwithstanding the labours of generations of assiduous scholars in many lands, we are still on the threshold"... Let us again quote from his former speech, "we feel encouraged from time to time when so eminent critics, so sagacious and impartial as, Prof. Foucher, Dr. Thomas or Prof. Sylvain Levi, come forward generously to recognise our efforts to wake up interest in these neglected



fields and to carry the horizon of India, beyond present India. And yet let it not be forgotten that in the department of Science perhaps more than in the department of Letters, University teachers and students, have systematically carried out original investigation of acknowledged value. We have, indeed made the University College of Science a nursery of young men of exceptional ability—Mathematicians, Physicists, Chemists, Botanists, Zoologists—whose researches have been eagerly accepted for publication by scientific societies and scientific periodicals in foremost seats of learning in Europe, America and Japan”.

Apart from these reforms and innovations which have changed the structure as well as the life and working of the University, transforming it into a centre of highest studies and researches, Asutosh's regime synchronised with a steady, phenomenal and unprecedented rise in the number of graduates and undergraduates turned out by the University. Before Asutosh stepped into the leadership of our academic life and thought, the number of students at the various institutions and of the candidates appearing at the University examinations, were very small; but with Asutosh's ascendancy in the affairs of the University, the movement* of educational

* “The growing demand of the people of Bengal for educational facilities is one of the most impressive features of our age and is in itself healthy and admirable”... The Report of the Calcutta University (Sadler) Commission.



progress and expansion received a great impetus, and the demands of popular education, of liberal culture and of enlightenment became widespread and incessant and the demands came from all quarters and are ever on the increase; the new generations in Bengal with their innatelonging for, and love of, study and learning, came, in their ever increasing numbers to the shrine of the Goddess of Learning; and the educational institutions of the province doubled, the annual rush of the candidates at the University examinations became tremendous; Asutosh rose equal to the occasion, grasped and faced the situation, in a manly and patriotic way; himself an ardent student and enthusiastic scholar, he was not at all alarmed by this welcome invasion of the sacred temple of the Mother by so many thousands of devotees; he deliberately refrained from stiffening their course; rather did he work to smooth their path and blessed their careers with the University's hall mark; the result was that his dream, his hope and his ambition to endow every villiage, every hamlet, nay every home in Bengal with its graduate and its undergraduates was on the road to its realization; * in this nation-wide policy he did not aim at ideal excellence or perfection; but deliberately and courageously

*A comparisson between the annual numbers of graduates before and during, Asutosh's regime, will speak for itself.

1885—1908—	Average annual number of graduates—			438
1909—1915—	Do	Do	Do	1027
1916—1924—	Do	Do	Do	2464



worked to "scatter the seeds of science and of song, that climate, corn, animals, men, may be milder, and germs of love and benefit may be multiplied."

These were, in a nutshell, a barest outline of some of the innovations and achievements of his glorious career as a reformer and creator in the realm of education; but like all creations and reforms, and the workings of all forward policies and the pursuits of new ideals—his measures had their full share of criticism and appreciation, like all reformers and creators in history, he was virulently condemned as well as intensely admired and profusely applauded; we can only refer to some of these criticisms and appreciations and this, very briefly. In consideration of most of these criticisms, one is invariably struck with a good deal of irrelevancy, of loose thinking and confusion of ideas displayed not only by the man in the street, but also by those who are expected to be more well-informed. A very common type of criticism—forcibly urged but fallacious all the same—is this: the University (under the inspiration and leadership of Asutosh) has been unnecessarily swelling the volume of popular discontent and adding to the growing economic distress of the people, by an increasing flow of graduates and under-graduates; but it is easily forgotten that this economic distress is world-wide, that this popular discontent and unemployment are inseparable from the critical period of transition which nations and individuals are



passing through ; nor are these serious evils, of University's making, far less of its seeking ; this hydra-headed demon of popular economic distress and discontent has not suddenly come to the front—it has been raising its head gradually. Lord Minto referred to the growing evil but hoped "that with each succeeding year, the growth of home industries and the consequent demand for greater technical knowledge, together with the restoration of Indian Arts and Letters, will throw open fields of employment which, now, scarcely exist for those who need never think they have wasted their time in University." Good Lord Minto ! he did not live to see the fate of his pious wish. After the lapse of two decades during which many Commissions and Committees sat and reported without any tangible amelioration of the popular discontent or distress, Sir J. C. Bose thus spoke of this burning topic in London..."The present unrest in India is due to severe economic distress. The Universities are turning out a large number of science trained men who do not find scope for their activities. For the removal of the threatened economic danger, a comprehensive state policy is required."*

*Dr. J. C. Bose was more clear in Presidential Address to the Science Congress in India in January 1927; referring to this 'severe economic distress' he said, "I found poverty practically unknown in Norway and Denmark. The miracle is accomplished through Science of utilizing all the available resources of the country...The Universities are turning out every year a large number of young men trained in methods of science who form the most important intellectual



It is impossible to condemn Asutosh or his University for the growing economic distress, for the educated unemployment and under-employment that have permeated every stratum of the middle class people in Bengal, that, in short, threaten to engulf the whole community and result in huge wastage of nation's intellectual wealth and potentialities. Dr. Sadler and his colleagues on the University Commission did not bring the head of Asutosh on the charger but laid the blame at the door of the system. "It is impossible" they said in their Report, "not to recognize that a system which leads to such results (humble status and low pay of graduates) must be economically wasteful and socially dangerous and must in the end, lead to the intellectual impoverishment of the country." So the ultimate responsibility for this growing menace rests upon those who have, in their hands, the direction of public policy and of administration and alteration of the system—upon our rulers as well as upon the leaders of the people, to some extent, at any rate.

But the critics who condemn Asutosh, for adding, by an unnecessarily large influx of graduates and under-graduates, to the prevailing economic unrest and unemployment and under-employment among the educated, forget the important steps he took

asset of the country but find no scope for their activities. It is the function of high statesmanship to foresee the economic danger and so shape state policy that India's trained youth and her great potential wealth may be utilized for the benefit of the country."



towards the solution of this gigantic problem; strictly speaking, it was not within his province to try and tackle the problem; it is the clear duty of the statesmen, of the rulers and leaders of the people, and not of a reformer in the realm of education, to put their heads together and solve it; but Asutosh, as we have said more than once, was not merely an educational reformer; he was a statesman of long vision and he anticipated the enormous proportions the problem has now assumed; he got Captain Petavel to think and write out a proper plan for its solution in the form of five lectures—Self-Government and Bread Problem; he brought out two editions of these lectures and broadcasted them in India and abroad. The scheme and the plan formulated in these lectures were warmly approved by many notable Indians, pre-eminent in the sphere of commerce, industry and economics—by Sir R. N. Mukherjee, Sir Dinshaw Wacha and others, as well as by such well-known foreign journals as 'The Times' of London and 'Hibbert Journal' of America; the late Mr. C. R. Das, Mr. Kumar Krishna Dutt and other eminent men interested themselves in the scheme of educational colony on co-operative basis proposed by Captain Petavel. It is now in experimental stage and is being worked out at Deoghur. The part played by Asutosh in this movement is more important and entitles him to greater glory than are now generally realized.

Closely connected with this criticism based on



‘economic unrest,’ there is another, very plausible but still more erroneous. There is a class of critics who are wont to lose their mental equilibrium—who are greatly alarmed at the ever increasing stream of educated young men, specially when there is little scope for most of them; they labour under the impression that we in Bengal have already enough, more than enough of our graduates and undergraduates—we have more of these young people in our midst than is good for us, good for them, good for the body politic. But nothing is further from truth, there is no greater and sadder illusion than to flatter oneself with this belief; the fact is that the proportion of the educated few with the teeming uneducated and illiterate masses is only negligible. Fortunately for us and the University, there is a glaring admission of no less an authority than Lord Lytton than whom Asutosh had no greater antagonist, no more exalted opponent—an admission which is conclusive on this point and must take the wind out of the sail of the self-sufficient critics. “I know that so far from having too many educated men” declared His Lordship in the course of a Convocation speech, “it (our country) has not enough—it is idle to dream of building the manhood of Bengal upon the foundation of wide-spread illiteracy.”

Many charges are brought against Asutosh of lowering the standard of examination, of cheapening the degrees and of sacrificing the quality of



education for quantity. But unfortunately, people have vague, fantastic idea - or have no idea at all—when they speak gibly of lowering the standard of examination. An ideal examination is not one which is extra stiff or difficult, which, moreover, aims at the minimum number of success among the examinees; an ideal examination is that which is best suited to the prevailing circumstances of the country and in which proper regard is had to the academic conditions and intellectual equipment of the young men. In this connection we will refer to the significant words of one who was the president of Lord Curzon's famous Universities Commission and who had, in His Lordship's words, 'unique familiarity' with British University life. "Our critics" said Dr. Thomas Raleigh in the course of his Convocation Address to the Calcutta University, (when he was Vice-Chancellor) "are too ready to assume that the acknowledged defects of our system are peculiar to British India... The standard of our degrees, is not perhaps, so high as it ought to be. But when I examined in the schools at Oxford it was my duty to pass, as I did pass, a considerable number of gentlemen who ought to display a great mobility in the field of learning, because they travel with a minimum weight of equipment." As regards the charges of cheapening the degrees and upholding the quantity—though not at the cost of quality—of education, Asutosh must plead guilty to a some extent, but not in the way his critics would have it. Asutosh, as we said,



resolved to scatter the blessings of education and culture far and near and everywhere and he was anxious to bring all sorts and conditions of men, rich and poor, high or low, prince and peasant within the beneficent influence of the University ; so he deliberately kept its door wide open; in the absence of any forward policy and nation-wide programme in education adopted * by our rulers, rather in the presence of 'a retrogressive policy' * and opposition in the all-important question of educational advancement, Asutosh's was the only policy best calculated to bring the blessings of education to the largest numbers of his countrymen. But by no stretch of argument or imagination could he be charged with sacrificing the quality, at the altar of quantity, of education. He did not, of course, make the examinations extra stiff; he even 'passed' many—it might be, too many—who could not have passed in other men's regime. But how, by this policy or action of his, could he be said to have sacrificed the quality of education ? Did he discourage the 'quality'? Was he, by thought, word or action, opposed to the best sort of education that might be given to the young men ? The head and front of his offending was that he did not insist,

*"A retrogressive policy has been followed since Lord Dufferin's time... The results on secondary and collegiate education were deplorable. National education not being recognised by Government as an obligation..." Sir Sankaran Nair's Minute of Dissent to the Government of India's Despatch to the Secretary of State, dated 16th April, 1919.



with a vengeance, on this 'quality' in all, in the thousands of the candidates that sat for the various examination, and this, surely, is far from sacrificing the quality at the cost of quantity.

The criticisms levelled against the Post-Graduate Departments are many and various; it is, however, not possible for us to refer to most of them or to refer, at any great length. The charges of premature developments, of 'thoughtless' expansions and of extravagance are common enough. It is gravely argued that the supreme need of the country—the need of the hour—is the spread of primary education and the spread and improvement of secondary education; the developments of the University in the domain of higher study and research are premature and are a luxury. No one in his senses, will question, far less minimise, the need and importance of primary and secondary education in India. But why should University education, and higher studies and researches be a luxury on that score? and if these are to wait for a millennium in primary and secondary education—then their time will never come; let us quote from Asutosh; "Some enthusiasts" he said in 1912, "may be inclined to urge on this occasion, the so-called paramount claims of adequate provisions of universal primary (and we might add, of secondary) education, before any increase of expenditure on higher education and research. To them, I would only reply, if higher teaching has to wait for admittedly needful development until a full



satisfactory scheme of general primary (and we might say, of secondary) education is established through the length and breadth of the land, the day for these higher developments will never come. The two demands stand on ultimately different planes, and history teaches very clearly that in all the great seats of culture and civilization, learning, speculation and research of the highest type have developed and benefitted the world, independently of any general system of primary education. From the narrow point of view of material prosperity, active and liberal promotion of learning and research is, at least, as important as arrangements under which every tiller of the soil and every mechanic may learn to sign his name and read a newspaper. Even less I am prepared to listen to the warning voices of those who often, in the interests of secondary education declare that no higher developments in M. A. teaching will be profitable until secondary schools have been placed on a perfect footing. Why—to mention a specially striking illustration—is teaching of Indian History in our schools, more particularly in the earlier periods, so lamentably defective and barren—mainly because the so-called teachers of history never themselves have had any proper training in the subject, no such training has anywhere been provided by the colleges and the Universities..”

The charge of ‘thoughtless expansion’ was brought forward by no less a person than the ‘responsible’ Minister of Education in the first ‘Reformed’



Council. It is difficult to understand what exactly the Minister meant—what exactly the charge really amounted to; inscrutable are the ways of the Power on High as well as the powers that be. But the expansions of the functions of the University so far from being 'thoughtless', left nothing to be thought out; the utter hollowness and absurdity of the charge is apparent to all who has the least acquaintance with the life and working of the University since 1904; indeed nothing can be more elaborately thought or thrashed out, under the Act of 1904 which clearly referred to the 'instructions of students' and appointment of 'University professors, Lectures' etc., the new Regulations were framed after prolonged deliberations in 1906. In the latter half of sutosh's first tenure of Vice-Chancellorship, the Government of India sanctioned and have been maintaining many Chairs; then came the labours and Report of Post-Graduate Consolidation Committee in 1916; the Report of this Committee on which sat six Europeans and three Indians as well as the scheme framed thereunder were blessed by two successive Governors of Bengal—Lords Carmaichael and Ronaldshay—and were minutely deliberated upon, and then sanctioned by the final authority—the Government of India; and the outcome of all these and subject-matter of all these were the expansions of the University which were characterized as 'thoughtless'. The distinguished scholar and our late Governor, Lord Ronaldshay thus



spoke of these expansions and the scheme, "...But the greatest land mark in the history of the University in recent years, is undoubtedly the creation of the Post-Graduate studies. As Rector of the University, I gave the scheme my wholehearted support, because it seemed to me that it was calculated to establish in Calcutta under the auspices of the University, a real centre of learning and research...I had in mind the famous Indian Universities of a past age, such, for instance, as Nalanda. I had vision of a modern Nalanda growing up in this the greatest and most popular city of the Indian Empire..."

The charge of extravagance is a very plausible one ; none the less it is difficult to make out what it really means ; the critics who bring this serious charge persuade themselves that the University has been suffered to expand its functions, to develop its activities on an extravagant scale. But nothing is further from fact ; so far from living and thriving on extravagant lines, it is as yet far from attaining its maximum expansions ; it has a great future and immense possibilities ahead ; as Dr. C. Y. Raman said in 1923..."Even now, the scheme of Post-Graduate studies at Calcutta has not reached its maximum development..." Only a short time ago, it was prominently reported* in a leading Paper in India

The following will speak also itself for :—

* A film university will shortly be founded in New York. It will be connected with the famous Columbia University, of which Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler is head. The University had the first



that a well-known carpenter in New York has been appointed to the newly created Chair of Internal Decoration in a famous American University. "If the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge" (which by the bye, enjoy fabulous incomes) said Asutosh in his ever memorable Convocation speech of 1923, "are deemed not to have done enough in the way of provision for advanced teaching and research, would it not be an error of the first order to assume that our arrangements are sufficient to meet the rapidly growing needs of our community? If it is apprehended that without further provision, Oxford and Cambridge are likely to find their position as centres of intellectual life seriously imperilled before long, is not there grave danger to our future progress as a nation, should our growth be atrophied at what is but the commencement of our career?" But often the charge of extravagance is put forward on the basis of the proportion of teachers to the number of students in the Post-Graduate Departments; here again the critics miss the mark; it is, however easy to trace the genesis of this error of judgment, and

school of practical journalism in America, where the students actually produce a paper as part of their studies. The cinema school will have a course lasting two years. It will only be open to those who have previously taken the first two years of a science course.

A motion picture degree will be given to students who graduate. They will be allowed to specialize in various departments, but the course is intended to cover the three great branches of the film world—producing, selling and showing.



for this, we have only to look to the state of things prevailing in almost all the educational institutions; here there is no special teaching, no special study and the teachers have generally to take classes varying from 40 to 150 students, and the result is that there is seldom any intimate personal relationship, any proper and individual guidance and sympathetic understanding between the teachers and the taught, and this is the bane of the present system of education in our country. As Dr. Sadler and his colleagues pointed out in their Report, "In the lack of personal guidance and of intimate contact between the teachers and the taught is the greatest defect of the present system. No reform is more necessary than one which will bring back a real intimacy of personal relationship between teacher and taught." This serious defect in our whole educational system Asutosh sought to remedy in the University; here the claims of special study and research require special teachers, who have specialized in their subjects; and the whole object and scheme of higher study will be frustrated without the 'personal guidance of the teachers without a close and 'intimate contact' between the teachers and the taught. So Asutosh had had to engage not only an efficient staff but also a staff sufficient in numerical strength to give the individual students and research scholars the necessary 'personal guidance' and to establish 'a real intimacy of personal relationships' between themselves and the students. And how far the University is



guilty of extravagant stuff may judged by the very lucid and straightforward Memorandum of the Presidency College submitted by Mr. James and his colleagues, in which they compained not of extravagance, but of the inadequacy of the stuff employed by the University in many departments.

Let us now turn to the other side of the shield ; it is no little satisfaction to find that not only 'so many of the best and truest men of our people' but also of other independent countries, 'are in full sympathy with us'; and not only 'the sister Universities,' in, but also others beyond the boarders of, India, 'are eager to imitate and emulate what have been 'boldly initiated' here. Dr. Ganga Nath Jha, perhaps the greatest living orientalist in India, said, in the course of his Convocation Address to the Allahabad University, "The term Post-Graduate need not lead any one to the hope or fear that we are going to reproduce the conditions prevailing at Calcutta. That, I am sorry, to say is beyond us. But I must confess that institution (C. U.) will serve us as an ideal. It is mainly the Post-Graduate Department of the Calcutta University which, with all its defects, has demonstrated, beyond doubt—that work of the highest kind, can be carried on in India. I have had several occasions of judging the work that is being done there in the domain of oriental studies ; and I am prepared to assert that most of the thesises submitted by researchers of the Calcutta University are superior to many of these that have imanated



from persons trained elsewhere." "The Department of Post-Graduate teaching" declared Dr. Jha on another occasion, "stands out prominently as the monument of his deep scholarship and far-sightedness; with all its defects, the said department, during the few years of its existence, has produced a band of scholars whose enthusiasm and work in the cause of research have shown what even an Indian University can achieve. . ."

"Today" said Lord Lytton on a memorable occasion, "we can think only of the great intellectual powers he placed at the service of the University, of the years of unremitting toil that he cheerfully spent in organizing and administering its higher branches and of the renown, not only in India but in Europe which he, thereby gained for Calcutta..." "He multiplied Chairs, and Lectures and and Publications" wrote Dr. Sylvain Levi, "so that while the other Universities of India vegetated, the University of Calcutta saw its faculties flourish, its students gather together and the teachers of Indian nationality installed in every department of instruction and India herself installed in the centre of programme of studies." "After all" said Sir Ewert Greaves, on the anniversary of his death, "the Post-Graduate department was the crown and glory of Sir Asutosh Mookerji's work as an educationist, and it is in this that his memory will chiefly live. In so saying, I am not merely expressing my own views but the considered judgment of his colleagues on the



University Commission who considered it an abiding glory that he had established for the first time in an Indian University, a department for the development and encouragement of research in all branches of learning." But perhaps the most remarkable tribute to the organizing genius and constructive statesmanship of Asutosh as a builder and reformer in the realm of intellectual regeneration and of educational progress of his country is this that distant Universities in foreign lands have begun to follow his lead and imitate his example. Let us again quote from Dr. Raman who has seen most of the well-known Universities of the world. Said Dr. Raman, at a meeting of the Council of Post-Graduate Teaching in Science, ... "A few days ago I came to know that foreign Universities have not been slow to imitate the example set by the Calcutta University in this respect; the University of Toronto in Canada has adopted an organization substantially similiar to that which now exists at Calcutta for the encouragement of Post-Graduate Studies. As you all know Toronto has one of the largest and most important Universities of Canada and it is no small compliment to the originality of Sir Asutosh, that other countries should follow the example set here."

Few people realize the magnitude and significance of his singular achievements and his solid labours in the great nation-building, nation-lifting department of education, in the domain of educational reform and intellectual progress. Long before the famous



declaration by the British Government in England of the aim of their policy towards India—the policy of making India a self-governing partner in the British Commonwealth of Nations—long before the Ideal of a free, and self-supporting India having an honoured place in the comity of nations was accepted and worked up to by all the politicians in India, Asutosh laboured for this consummation in the intellectual sphere; who knows, when it will please God that India will take her place among the free nations of the world; but thanks to Asutosh's statesmanship, his imagination and idealism, India has already been accorded an honoured place in the cultural and intellectual world, in the republic of Letters and Science.

The goal of British policy is the establishment of self-government in India; a free self-contained, self-supporting and self-governing India is today the accepted ideal of all political parties and national workers and leaders; and Asutosh did much to hasten and herald this glorious day by making India, making Bengal, self-contained, self-respecting and self-governing, to some extent—in the matter of the highest educational institution, where facilities exist for highest studies and researches, and where highest intellectual works are carried on. A free and self-governing India can not, with propriety, always depend upon foreign lands and foreign Universities, for the education and training of her best and ablest intellect; she must herself—within her own



boarders—give this education and training and develop the best intellect and equip the ablest youths with necessary knowledge and culture. These facilities, this training and education are given by the Calcutta University, thanks to Asutosh's constructive statesmanship and patriotic activities.

Nor are the immediate consequences of the great impetus given by him to the nation-wide movement for enlightenment and progress, less striking. Immediately after his accession to power in our academic life, all sections of the community, boys and children of all stations of life, even from the lowest strata of society flocked to the schools and colleges and were brought under the enlivening influence of the University; the rural classes, eternally following their ancestral avocations, left the beaten tract and sent their children to schools and some of them to the colleges. And the pursuit of this course of action by all classes of the population is fraught with great and momentous consequences. It has disturbed the placid contentment of millions, and signs are visible around of stirrings of a new life, the clash of new ideals and conflicts of new ideas with many, old and worn out ones; this new spirit and the new influence of education and progress—infused by Asutosh—have penetrated into the inner depths of our social and domestic life and has not left untouched, even the fair sex. 'The adoption of academic ambition' eloquently says the University Commission in their Report, "even by a small portion of the cultivating



classes is an event of great moment in the social history of Bengal ; it may be the herald of a social revolution." This 'social revolution' may be a far off reality—beyond the range of the practical. But there is no denying the fact that the great movement for enlightenment and progress—which Asutosh struggled all his life to further and help forward from his place in the University—has come to stay and has taken deep roots in the soil.

Apart from the intrinsic and historic value of the actual reforms and expansions and innovations that he carried out, Asutosh's labours and his works in the University have another and a very momentous aspect which is often overlooked. In all his activities and his achievements, in all his strivings and sacrifices, if there is any thing that stands out more prominently than others it is his fidelity to the lofty Ideal, his constancy to high principles, that have been accepted by advanced spirits and have been governing academic life and thought all the world over. Before the Indian Universities Act came into force, its author—the brilliant pro-consul, Lord Curzon—thus conceived the highest Ideal for the University : "...It (the Ideal University) ought to be a place where all knowledge is taught by the best teachers to all who seek to acquire it, where all knowledge so taught is turned to good purpose... and its boundaries are receiving constant expansion. If I may borrow a metaphor from politics, there is no scientific frontier to the domain of knowledge



...where the governing body of the University shall be guided by expert advice and teachers will have real influence upon teaching; where the courses of study shall be framed for the development not of the facile automatum but of the thoughtful mind..." But it is one thing to preach a lofty idealism and another, to practise it; it is one thing to conceive, and wax eloquent over, a high Ideal and quite a different thing to work up to it. And Asutosh upon whom devolved the gigantic task of reforming and revolutionizing the life and working of the University under the new Act, conceived the highest Ideal and never swerved from, but followed in storm and stress, the path chalked out, in its light. "It is the duty of the University" he observed in 1922, "to gather from the persistent past, where there are no dead, and embody within, its walls the learning of the world in living exponents of scholarship who shall maintain in Letters, and Science and Arts, the standards of Truth and Beauty and canons of criticism and taste. It is further incumbent upon the University to enlarge the boundaries of human learning and give powerful aid to the advancement of learning by the development of creative capacity. A University so designed to the service of the nation can not be restricted to a narrow or chosen teaching. ... To my mind the University is a great storehouse of learning, a great laboratory for training as well of men of thought as of men of action.



“It has been our ambition to bring the University in intimate touch with the Nation, because of the supreme part it must play in national consciousness”.

As he conceived and worked up to this lofty Ideal, he stood up ‘four square’ and fought sternly and resolutely for the high principles at once essential and sacred to all true progress and greatness in academic life and thought. And never was he greater, never did he soar to loftier planes than, when in the most critical hour in the history of academic freedom and development in our country, he stood “unreservedly by the doctrine that if education be our policy as a nation, let it not be our politics, that freedom is its life-blood, the condition of its growth and the secret of its success.” Happily, no matter however stoutly he might have been opposed, no matter however desperately he might have fought for this noble Ideal and these high principles, he was in excellent company; the Ideal and the principles he upheld are accepted by the thought leaders, all over the world. Sir J. C. Bose also spoke feelingly in this strain, upholding the high Ideal, in his recent Address to the Convocation of Nagpur University, “The highest function of a University is the advancement of frontiers of knowledge for the common benefit of humanity...” “The University” said Lord Haldane (in a striking Address) than whom there is no higher authority in matters educational, “is a place of research, where the new and necessary knowledge is to be developed. It is a place of training where



the exponents of that knowledge—men who seek authority based on it—are to be matured and receive their spiritual baptism...Freedom and Development are the breath of its nostrils and it can recognise no authority except that which rests on the right of Truth to command obedience...'

As we have already said, Asutosh's works and achievements in the domain of educational advancement may be viewed from different standpoints; his throwing open of the flood-gates of Knowledge and Culture, his widening of the doors of his 'alma mater' has an important bearing on the present and future history of his country. It is the unique privilege of the Universities in the advanced countries of the world to supply not only the advanced spirits but also the standard bearers in the cause of Progress and Truth in every sphere of human activities and thought; but in India, the Universities 'made in the doll factory of the bureaucracy', were wont to move in the narrow and sterile grooves; it was reserved for Asutosh, (to use Tagore's inimitable words again) not only to have 'heroically fought against heavy odds for winning freedom for our education' but also to have performed 'the miracle of introducing a living heart into the steel framework'; and thus our University, under the leadership and inspiration of Ashutosh—living or dead—has been making up the lee-way in the intellectual and



cultural race started all over the world by foreign Universities. And it is the ever increasing streams of youngmen trained or turned out by the University who are working, and accelerating the march of the movements of progress and freedom in every direction ; it is from the ranks of these youngmen, call them whatever you will, it is from these that the torch-bearers of political freedom or social emancipation or the many ministering angels of suffering humanity have come forward and will come forward in the days and years to come ; at the psychological moments in the country's history, in hours of sorest trials and tribulations, it is these young men who have rallied round the banner of Surendra Nath, of Gandhi, of Chittaranjan and Profulla Chandra and have courted untold hardships and privations ; it is again these young men with an exuberance of energy and an abundance of idealism, who can—as has been recently pointed by the greatest living master in Bengalee fiction—lay down, and have actually laid down their lives for the sake of an idea, on the altar of the Ideal.

This liberation from the fetters of ignorance and superstition, this elevation to higher planes of culture and idealism, this awakening of the nation's youthful manhood into a new life and thought for which Asutosh worked—as few individuals have done in India—have a world-significance. Today the world is tottering, stumbling and bleeding under the chariot-wheels of its masters—groaning under



the iron heels of its elders ; today world-youth — is awake and active and anxious to wrest from the faltering hands of its elders the reins ; there is a world-wide youth-movement, youth-assertion, youth-awakening. As Dr. Brojendra Nath Seal said, the other day), in a prophetic strain, 'the cult of the world is the cult of the youth.. youth is the saviour of the world.' Not only in the West and America, but also in Russia and Turkey, in Egypt and Persia, in China and Japan, the youth is awake and out to wrest from the enfeebled grasp of the old, the banner of Progress and Truth. Shall India, shall Bengal lag behind in this awakening of youths of the world—India, which, before the very dawn of civilizations and birth of history, hailed 'holy light ! offspring of heaven, eternal, coeternal'...? Asutosh said, 'No', and an emphatic 'no' it was. From his place at the helm of affairs at his University, he laboured and struggled and toiled for the awakening and uplift of the youth-spirit in India, for a cultural and intellectual regeneration of his country's youthful manhood and thus it was his proud privilege as a reformer in the realm of education to have worked, in his own country for the youth-movement of the world and thus to have elevated, enlivened and enriched his country's youth with the spirit of the world-youth.



CHAPTER IX.

The Powerful Public Man.

His unique position in public life—His activities in the legislature and brief career in the old Imperial Legislative Council—He was a skillful parliamentarian but no typical politician, his shrewd suspicion of an 'unenlightened' democracy—His strong views on the place, the rights and functions of the University in the body politic—He uniformly upheld the grand democratic doctrine of Napoleon—His emphatic views on the question of students and politics—The conflict of his opinions, his policy and his actions with those of Mahatma Gandhi and Deshabandhu Das, the call of the leaders of the Non-co-operation Movement to boycott educational institutions in touch with the Government, the students' response and Asutosh's bold stand in Bengal—The two standpoints and policies, an estimate of their respective consequences, their practical worth and moral excellences.

'The most powerful public character in India', Asutosh was naturally among the most predominant and pre-eminent public men of his country; but this pre-eminence stands on a different footing from that of any one of his compatriots; for unlike them, Asutosh worked for and won his unique position in public life—in a sphere other than politics which, unfortunately, absorb almost all our activities and energies and attract most of our able and active men. No doubt as a prominent public man he shone as much in the Senate as on the floor of the Legislative Council; hence in his early days, the fame of the politician in Council Chamber was equal to the

SIR ASUTOSH MOOKERJEE—A STUDY.

ascendancy of the educationist, and though his elevation to the Bench put an end to the activities of the public man in the political sphere, Asutosh's varied interests and unparalleled versatility, his momentous labours and singular achievements in the domain of educational expansions and intellectual regeneration, reacted upon, and influenced, every department of our public life. As Lord Lytton eloquently said, "Sir Asutosh Mookerjee was the most striking and representative Bengali of his time. The versatility of intellect and variety of his interests were so great that there is scarcely any department of the public life of this province which has not been left the poorer by his death."

It is almost a truism to say that it was not his labours in the sphere of politics—but in the realm of educational expansion and progress—that really established Asutosh as the 'most powerful public character in India'; in his mature active life, he was never in the political arena but was, for a brief period, in the legislature; as the representative of the Calcutta University in the Bengal Legislative Council, Asutosh very quickly made his presence felt. When the Calcutta Municipal Bill—the notorious Mackenzie Act—was on the legislative anvil, he took a prominent part in criticising the reactionary Bill and voicing public opinion against it. His contribution to the debate on the floor of the House impressed the Government considerably and he was, as we have already seen, nominated to the newly constituted Corporation



of Calcutta and remained a Commissioner thereof for years. On his election to the Imperial Legislative Council, as Bengal Council's representative, his powers of expression and of criticism, the clarity of his judgment and the breadth of his outlook, his keen discernment of good features in an ostensibly bad measure, his forensic eloquence and his superb debating faculties made him a formidable opponent of the Treasury Benches and a powerful factor to be reckoned with ; his activities in the Legislature, not to speak of his association with the Corporation, marked him out as a rising politician, a prominent public man, a keen debator, an incisive speaker, a courageous leader and a faithful champion of the public opinion.

And the Imperial Legislative Council of those days was not exactly like its present, or even its immediate successor. Today, under the Government of India Act of 1919, Indian Legislative Assembly is a decided improvement, out of all recognition, upon the old Council, in the strength of elective and non-official element and in the matter of composition, and of constitution. The old Council before the Morley-Minto Act, was worse than a 'gilded sham', with its official block, convened as it was from time to time, to register the decrees of an unrepresentative alien Executive and invest them with the mockery of a legislative sanction.

Any one who has no acquaintance with the dreary proceedings of our legislature of the period,



will have little idea as to what the task and position the few patriotic Indian public men were therein. But now two decades have rolled by; another generation has sprung up; looking back from the high pedestal of our present day conditions one cannot but be filled with admiration at the manly stand, the tenacious fight and the heroic spirit of our lonely representatives surrounded by the official phalanx in the Council Chamber where our destinies were sought to be moulded. Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh, the greatest Indian jurist, a most brilliant speaker and a towering, striking personality, could readily be imagined to have floored his big official colleagues in the Council as easily as a giant does a pigmy. It can also be imagined that Mr. Gokhale—than whom few greater politicians and debators have arisen in our midst and who had devoted all his life to the politics and public affairs of his country—should often outshine the official luminaries. But, for Asutosh, a newcomer as he was to the Imperial Council, to have dealt with the Universities Bill in the manner he did, laying it bare in its defects, its far-reaching effects and its possibilities was really worthy of a veteran parliamentarian.

As we have had occasions to refer to, Asutosh grasped the fundamentals and potentialities of the measure more ably than any other Indian member; and he was able to visualize the future course of progress and the future field of expansion of his



'alma mater'. It was only for a very brief period that he was in the Imperial Council; the Universities Bill was calculated to radically change the character and constitution, ideal and function of the Universities; and it was most far-reaching in its effects, as it was meant to regulate and control, mould and restrict higher education; so it drove the country into a vortex of intense agitation. But Asutosh's able handling of this controversial measure, his mastery of the facts of his case, his firm grip of the principles involved and of the interests at stake, his sense of the actualities of the present as well as of the potentialities of the future, entitle him to a equal share of credit and glory with his great colleague—the late Mr. Gokhale; but his elevation to the Bench rung the curtain on the career of the rising politician and legislator.

He could, as we have said, lay bare a complicated piece of legislation and subject an intricate problem, or a subtle and ingenious scheme, to the search light of his enlightened criticism; he could as easily see through a controversial measure; he could elucidate and explain a far-reaching and complex administrative proposal or dwell, or enlarge, upon larger questions of policy and principles, in a very lucid manner; he was always able to deliver a crushing invective against, or pass severe strictures upon, a person; through his criticism of a retrograde measure was telling and impressive, to a degree,



none-the-less could he discriminate between the good and bad elements of a mainly objectionable scheme or Bill; he would use his great forensic and dialectical skill and his compelling eloquence, as easily in support of his own proposition as in condemning and demolishing that of his opponents, a great lawyer and shrewd judge of men and things as he was, he always had a firm grasp of the basic principles and fundamentals underlying an important Bill or a difficult question of public interest; lastly, he would always be, on the look out for, as he had always had his eyes fixed upon, the opportunity—the opportunity of defence and of attack, of work and action, of learning and thinking; he would seize it and turn it good account as soon as it would present itself; he would seldom let a favourable chance slip through his fingers.

Like a shrewd navigator, it was his wont to watch the weather and examine the atmosphere, before embarking on his voyage; and like an experienced general that he was, who had been in the thick of the fight many a time and had won his wars first in his brain, then in the field, he would gather up his forces, calculate his strength, take hold of every strategic point and wait for the opportune moment to give his formidable adversary the expected battle; sometimes it so happened that no quarter was given, and flank movements, frontal attacks as well as blows at the most



vulnerable points, were equally good; these qualities of rare parliamentary leadership he possessed, and used to the full when necessity arose, in the course of his lifelong activities in the University.

For all his eloquence and activities in the Legislature he was not, by nature and temperament, a politician in the narrower and in the present day acceptation of the term; he never dabbled in politics—except once or twice in his student days; nor was he, by any means, a hero of a hundred platforms; the fact was he never took any prominent part in any political agitation. Whatever his views and opinions might have been on the burning questions of the day, on the broader political issues, on the more paramount policies and the abiding principles underlying the actions and mission of the rulers of the land, whatever might have been his actual feelings on the various situations that cropped up and developed from time to time, he was precluded, by his official position, to make them public, so we will leave him where he was; and it is best not to identify him exclusively with any particular party or programme; but it can be said and said without fear of contradiction that his heart was always with the nation, if not his head; he felt as keenly as the most ardent and emotional patriot, and even condemned emphatically, the humiliating conditions, the atmosphere of unnatural inferiority—that his



countrymen smarted under; his sensitive soul, his majestic nature, his independent spirit—his whole personality—rebelled at the manner in which some of the vital needs, some of the supreme interests of his country—as for instance, proper facilities and encouragements of higher studies and researches and the educational progress in general—were ministered to by the rulers of our land, the custodians of public fund, as he aptly termed them. But it may be conceded—it is even clear—he had a deep respect for established order of things, for established and enduring institutions such as the University; one may go further and say he cared a good deal for the much talked of, much abused, much misunderstood things—Law and order; he had, indeed not a little regard for law and order, in the true sense of the words; but not so much, perhaps, for the so-called laws which constitute the glorified decrees of an irresponsible executive, placed on the Statute Book in the teeth of popular opposition, which, moreover, are the negation of all sacred laws and violate the fundamental principles of equity and fairness, justice and liberty;—he was too great a jurist, too learned a legislator, too eminent a citizen to have any great and real regard for these ‘lawless laws.’ But the fact remains, he left politics severely alone; he had a shrewd suspicion of the undeveloped democracy—a democracy, without adequate education and culture, without a due sense of responsibility; and he meant to combat the evils, the



pernicious trends and tendencies, the manifold dangers and difficulties of a democracy, 'unenlightened and uninformed', by a widespread diffusion of a liberal and higher education; he believed,—and he tried to act accordingly—that 'weaknesses of democracy are the opportunities of education.'

Asutosh held very strong views on the place and function of University in the body politic; his opinion on the relation of University to the democracy—or on the newly voiced claim of the latter in India to have effective control in the affairs of the former—was also very pronounced. His views and opinions on these questions were, no doubt, coloured and moulded by the current controversies and conflicts that raged round the question; it is true also that the fury and vehemence of these controversies—the obstinacy and obduracy of the high officials who were the masters of the situation as they were the custodians of the public fund—stiffened his attitude and lent colour to his views; but it can be safely asserted that in the main, his views represented the fruits of his own mature judgments—the results of prolonged and profound thinking; as he felt strongly on these momentous questions, he expressed himself also strongly; let us quote from his inimitable and well-known speech at Lucknow University Union, "I yield to none in this hall," declared Asutosh, "in my fervent admiration of democracy and democratic institutions; at the same



time I realize the weaknesses and dangers of democracy. When a democracy imperiously demands control over the University, I answer without hesitation, 'pause my friends; your claim will be admissible when democracy ... is transformed into an intellectual aristocracy. What is the University? It is the crown of our national edifice. No University man will seriously suggest that we should hand over the control of the University to a democracy which has not come under the influence, much less realized the value, of the highest ideals of education in the life of the nation... Believe me, it is the function of the University to raise the nation, to guide the nation, to elevate the leaders of the democracy, not to be guided by them... The truth is that there is no guarantee that a Councillor or that even a Minister is in any manner fit to exercise control over the administration of a University ... the Minister is a creature of party politics.* Even if he be, when left to himself, inclined to behave as an enlightened man, he is bound to guide himself

*True it was that in Bengal, the Minister of Education and some legislators and some of the highest officials were firmly ranged against him when he desperately and heroically opposed official pressure and interference in the limited autonomy of the University; but the fear of outside interference from the legislature gained ground; and it was mainly with a view to eliminate the influence of political and party considerations and the chances of outside interference that the Railway Budget was separated from the general Budget and in Bengal the annual State contribution to the Dacca University was fixed by a Statutory Act.



by the inclination of the party he has the privilege to represent." We will only add here that Asutosh was on firm ground : for, enlightened opinion and advanced thought in Europe as well as the traditions of his own country were on his side. In the days of departed glory in India, in the distant past—in the long centuries that preceded her subjection—when were produced those immortal works in the various domains of human thought and activity, the preceptors and teachers reigned supreme in their own sphere and even extended their way to, though they were in many cases supported by, the Kings and the Ministers. The preceptors and teachers, the thinkers and philosophers, were left free to evolve India's systems and ideals of education and work them to the perennial welfare of their people. In the western countries also, the teachers and educationists are not disturbed in their tasks and the prevailing system of education does not suffer from undue and unseemly interference from the executive or the legislature. As Asutosh aptly said,—"We have yet to learn that the British House of Commons sits solemnly to discuss the details of University administration in Leeds, Manchester or Sheffield." But he never meant to place the University on a pedestal of its own—cut off from the life of the community; he always tried to 'bring the University into intimate touch with the nation'—he maintained that his 'alma mater' is a mere 'hand maid' to the greater and parental divinity—his motherland.



It is no doubt true that he was most stubborn and tenacious in his opposition to the organized and protracted attempt of a group of politicians and legislators—among whom were included the highest in the land—to bring the University under the control of the Government and Legislature. And during the latter period of his second Vice-Chancellorship, he devoted most of his energies and his great intellectual powers, his pretty super-human capacities and resourcefulness to the cause of the freedom of his 'alma mater' from 'democratic' interference and he greatly overworked himself to make his University independent of 'every rise and fall' in the political barometer. But in justice to him, it must be said that throughout his life, he was the greatest upholder of the most far-reaching and the magnificent democratic doctrine of Napoleon that in every society there must be scope for talent. As he was never a pettifogging politician playing to the gallery, he never made a fuss of this magnificent doctrine but worked for it, translated it into action throughout his active life—of course, within his own limited sphere—within the University. At the very beginning of his career as Vice-Chancellor, he declared.... "No University can rightly be regarded as fulfilling the purpose of its existence unless it enables intellectual powers, whenever detected, to exercise its highest functions." And he clung and held fast to this noble doctrine all his active life; as the head or the most influential member of the



greatest University in India, he followed it with unswerving loyalty and the result today is that quite a gallery of brilliant scholars and savants, scientists and literary men are provided in and by the University—men who, by the exercise of their intellect, have shed lustre upon their 'alma mater' and their motherland.

But he was firmly opposed to, and vigorously resisted, the prevailing tendencies of the popular upheaval, the whirlwind agitation that were meant to blow away the well-established educational institutions, that tended to sweep the impressionable and enthusiastic students off their natural avocations; in particular, he strongly and stoutly fought the attacks and onslaughts that were launched upon his own 'alma mater', built by his genius and life-long exertions; and he had the satisfaction of saving it from the tremendous blow directed against it by the leaders of the Non-cooperation Movement. More than once he gave forceful expression to his strong views on this question; he emphatically declared that the first and foremost duty of the students is to attend to his studies, to develop his character and intelligence and to gain, education and culture; in short, to mind his own particular business and not take an active and any large part in political agitation; he must not be tossed over hither and thither by the fluctuating tendencies in the political world, he must not be blown off his feet by every disturbance in the political atmos-



phere; he must not be blindly wedded to every prevailing political doctrine in the fashionable society; he must think for himself and try to subject all ideas and formulas to an intelligent intellectual analysis, to the search light of a calm and dispassionate judgment, and to the fire of his conscience. Let him study politics, follow political events closely, if he liked; but he should, he must, learn to form his own opinion, and not borrow it from others as copybook maxims; and so long as he was engaged in the sacred avocation of the student, he must not bury himself in political agitation; or in the perilous quicksands of politics—especially in a subject country like ours—he would be totally lost, as his character, his intelligence and his reasoning faculties were yet to be developed; and there are many sources of danger to be shunned; so the advice, the company and care of the guardians and teachers are essentially and constantly necessary. But these views of Asutosh came into direct conflict with those of the great leaders of the Non co-operation Movement—Mahatma Gandhi, Deshabandhu Chittaranjan and others. It was indeed, an irony of fate, for India, that these ardent patriots, these selfless workers, these leaders of thoughts should be in different and opposite camps, inspired as they were by the same ultimate objective, and urged by the same ultimate ideal; and this renders the task of assessing the comparative value and merit of the respective standpoints and respective courses of



action, all the more difficult and certainly the difficulty is exceedingly heightened by the fact that both Asutosh, and Mahatmaji and Deshabandhu had the supreme interests of their country at their heart; and they had a firm ground to take their respective stands upon; they had, moreover, ample and weighty reasons to support their policy and their programmes.

As is well-known, among the five-fold boycott proposed by Mahatma Gandhi, the boycott of the educational institutions connected with, controlled or aided by the Government, formed an important item; Deshabandhu C. R. Das—the accredited leader and apostle of the Non-co-operation Movement in Bengal—directed his assaults upon the educational institutions controlled by the Calcutta University—which, in its turn, was established by and is in constant touch with, the 'satanic' Government. The Government, moreover, exercises a good deal of control over, and a large influence in the affairs of, the Indian Universities—specially the Calcutta University—which were, some of them at any rate, looked upon as something in the nature of Government strongholds and Government preserves, so if the Universities and the constituent and affiliated institutions were boycotted, a powerful blow would have been dealt to the Government, and its prestige would have also been considerably lowered in the popular estimation; and even the severest critics of the Movement will hardly deny that ground



was being amply prepared for—as various forces were steadily working to bring about—the tremendous popular upheaval, that blowed all over the country; the whole Indian community was profoundly stirred and almost exasperated by the series of unparalleled events that took place in the political sphere—the events the magnitude and seriousness of which have scarcely been equalled. Popular indignation rose to fever heat; popular passions ran high and the students—the most impressionable portions of the population—specially the Bengali students, the most emotional in India, rebelled against, and were lashed into furious resentment, by the deliberate and highhanded, shocking and brutal acts of the authorities—acts, legislative, executive and administrative—which were perpetrated in Punjab and elsewhere, and which form some of the very darkest chapters of British Rule in India. In an atmosphere of gloom and sorrow, an atmosphere, surcharged at the same time, with unprecedented popular excitement and indignation, the message of the Mahatma, acquired an unreal, unearthly, and irresistible force and magnificence. It was in this electrified atmosphere that the Non-co-operation Movement was launched by Mahatma Gandhi to secure Swaraj and remedy the multifarious ills that the nation was groaning under and bleeding from. The students, impulsive and emotional in their nature, were easily carried away; and the clarion call of the leaders, the moving



eloquence, and the fervent appeal of Deshabandhu and his associates, met a ready response in the students community; they gave up their studies and came out of their colleges and schools in hundreds and thousands. The leaders held that education of the boys and youths of lacerated and down-trodden nation could wait but Swaraj, the sovereign remedy of all its ills, the panacea of the thousand and one evils could not; the boycott of the Government-controlled and Government-aided educational institutions and the adoption by the student population of active national service and national cause, were in their opinion, conducive to the attainment, and necessary for the struggle, of Swaraj; so the student population, they held, should be induced to leave the Schools and Colleges tainted with Government connection, and harnessed to the country's supreme cause of winning freedom. After the first flashes of excitement had spent themselves, popular enthusiasm cooled down; various factors were active to bring about a change in the electrified atmosphere and Asutosh who, as has been referred to, resolutely stuck to his post at the helm of affairs in the Calcutta University, had the satisfaction of seeing his Alma Mater once more, and more firmly enthroned in the hearts of his people; his sober views prevailed and the students returned to their folds.

He is a bold man indeed who would take upon himself to brush aside one or other of the standpoints,

without sufficiently weighing and assessing the comparative merits of the two different and opposite points of view, of the two policies and conflicting courses of action; in fine, much can be said on both sides; or rather Asutosh and Deshabandhu were both right—so far as they went; theirs were possibly different paths leading, ultimately, to the same goal; but the path chalked out by Asutosh was the normal one, easier of the two—it was a steady, slow but a practical course; while the one advocated by Mahatma and Deshabandhu, had the sensational and dramatic in a large degree, attractive and easy at the first and initial stage, but was extremely difficult and distressing at the next ones, entailing a world of sacrifice and hardship. Asutosh was profoundly anxious—as anxious as any one else—to advance the cause of the freedom and prosperity of his motherland; it was with this end in view that he turned out hundreds and thousands of educated youths who, intoxicated with the love of freedom and burning with enlightened patriotism, would unfurl the banner of knowledge and culture and freedom throughout the length and breadth of the land; he was determined to bring the University into the intimate touch with the life of his people; he was eager to guide the University to take its proper place and its adequate share in the service of the nation to play the supreme part in national consciousness, through its various departments of applied and pure Science, as well



as of Arts and Letters; he was very keen upon turning his Alma Mater into a centre of highest intellectual activities and thinking, and particularly into a great centre where higher studies and researches could be carried on into dim and distant period of unwritten and improperly written history of ancient India with a view to present to the world and to her own people a picture of her bygone greatness and glory and to point out the true and proper directions of national progress and national activities and thus help forward the movement for her regeneration and resurrection; through his University, he was also bent upon raising the status of his country in the intellectual and cultural world, and was determined to win it an honourable place in the republic of Letters and Science by means of the University's intellectual activities and contribution to the forward march of Knowledge and Truth. And all these, it was his good fortune to see as accomplished facts, in a large measure; and all these gave a great impetus to the freedom movement, by kindling a sense of self-respect, and by rousing a self-confidence and self-consciousness, in the minds of his countrymen.

But it may perhaps be said without any the least disparagement, to the moral elevation of the leaders of the Non-co-operation Movement, that it was launched undoubtedly on slippery ground; true it was that their ideals were lofty to a degree, and their ideas, great and glorious; but this



part of their programme they could not bring to fruition; their gain was temporary, to say the least, and in the long run, the boycott of Schools and Colleges failed; for the vast majority of the class from which the students came had little of their moral equipment and spiritual elevation; so they could not, did not carry out this part of their programme; the average member of the middle class (people) is a practical man, cool and calculating and is more, much more, concerned with immediate and concrete results than ultimate objective and ulterior gain, however high and noble. And when the great leaders, bade all their countrymen, young and old, rich and poor, hands off from the educational institutions—no matter whatever their value, their work, their ideals and their possibilities—simply for their distant or direct connection with the 'satanic' Government—they certainly, appealed more to the emotional than intellectual, more to the sentimental than practical, side of human nature; for they did not, or could not, make any great and adequate arrangements and provision for the education and enlightenment—on national lines—of hundreds and thousands of the students that left the existing institutions at their call; they failed, it is no reflection on their unique patriotism—as they were more destructive than constructive—in their activities; they had not established any national University that could rival or cast into



shade, the Calcutta University, and they branded the latter as the breeding ground of slave mentality; but it was the definite object and supreme aim of the University—and of the education imparted under its auspices—as Asutosh, aptly put it—‘to free the slave and then build the man’; and if there was slave mentality abroad it was not exactly quite proper that the University—which is the one institution that, stands for Progress and Truth, Knowledge and Culture, Learning and Scholarship,—should be singled out and penalized, instead of, being reformed and rejuvenated; the whole outward structure of the society, the very atmosphere of a subject country like ours, breed slave mentality, and the unnatural relations subsisting between the rulers and the ruled, one nation lording it over another, one people having everything done for them by, another—the one, constantly in expectation of favours or frown from the other—all these generate slave mentality.

The remedy of this and other multifarious evils which it is the inevitable lot of a subject country to suffer from, is not simply and solely what the politicians as well as the leaders of the Non-co operation Movement aimed at, and agitated for—political powers and political freedom; the remedy lies in what Asutosh and the University stood for—Progress and Emancipation in the broadest sense of the terms,—freedom not only from the political subjection but also



from religious fanaticism, morbid social orthodoxy and moral degradation—'advancement of learning' adding to the sumtotal of human knowledge, and contributing to the prosperity of the people. Let us however suppose that the Non-co-operation Movement has fulfilled its object; it has succeeded in wresting us some form of Self-Government from the not overwilling hands of our rulers; but with the University and the whole educational system under it demolished and stopt functioning, and ceasing to supply, strengthen and enrich the materials and ingredients out of which will grow and struggle and rise, a vigorous and enlightened nation, the foundations as well as the superstructure of true and enduring Swaraj could not be built; and with the chief centres of intellectual activities and thought, study and researches destroyed—centres, from which issue forth not only a stream of educated youths and enlightened manhood but also of new life and new light, Swaraj or some form of Self Government won in so dramatic a manner will hardly endure for a considerable length of time; it will be difficult to keep and save it from its enemies as well as its friends; for the supply of enlightened manhood of the nation—true strength and cement of real Swaraj—will be stopped; as Rome was not built in a day it would have taken long enough to establish on a firm foundation, the Swaraj University and its educational system; these latter in their turn, would surely have taken a long time to spread their blessings.



far and wide and to have taken deep root in the soil. in the meantime, owing to the ravages of the Non-co-operation Movement, the golden seeds sown by Asutosh and the golden harvest which was already in the process of being reaped would have all ended in smoke ; and the nation would have undoubtedly stood to lose, in the long run

This is but the practical side of the question ; this is judging the two policies and two courses of action by their calculated, actual and immediate results ; and in the practical field, in the realm of the actual, Asutosh might be said to have come with flying colours ; he braved the storm, he vindicated his ideal and practical results justified his bold action. But there is still, as always, another side, of the shield. On a higher and moral plane,* Asutosh, has, perhaps, to yield the palm to Mahatma and Deshabandhu ; apart from the actual consequences and the sad breakdown of the Movement, specially, in its boycott of the Government-connected educational institutions and centres of learning and researches, there is something extremely manly, something grand and glorious, something, spectacularly appealing and sublime in the very idea of the students, the youthful intellegentia, the promising young intellectuals of the land, being harnessed to the

* We shall have more to say on this momentous question, in the last Chapter.



greater cause of their country's political freedom; their presence in the vanguard of exacting service and sacrifice in the forward march and direct action is a sight for Gods to see—much like the youths of Italy following the lead of Mazzini and Garibaldi, and those of France rallying round the banner of Revolution. But though, the great Mahatma reckoned without his host, though his idea was more ennobling than enduring and his ideal, too heavenly, too high to be really and easily caught hold of or stuck to, though his Movement required for its practical and definite success a unique moral elevation and mental discipline, though the path that his message called his people to tread on, demanded the sacrifice of material prosperity and happiness, luxury and riches, fame and name, in short, most that makes life alluring to most men—and it was too much for them—none the less was he, on a higher moral plane. His ideals and his message, shining as they do, in their loftier grandeur and heavenly glory, made the greatest impression in the world and appealed to the thought-leaders and advanced spirit of the peoples abroad—their very impracticability invests them with a sublime and supreme significance which seems to dim the lustre of Asutosh's immediate victory and success.



CHAPTER X.

The Statesman.

A subject country is no training ground of statesman—The dearth of statesmen in India of today, due not to any inherent or constitutional defect, but to the political subjection—Among the solitary statesmen of India, Asutosh shone prominently—His achievements and labours—His statesmanlike insight and wisdom, the breadth of his vision and the clearness of his perspective—The remarkable record that he left, worthy of any statesman of the world—the most important of his acts of statesmanship.

Asutosh had nothing of the pettifogging, compromising, imposing, typical politician in or out of office; he had little of the time-serving, loud-mouthed, public man whose activities end in the Legislature, in the press or on the platform; but he had the sure instincts of a seer, the makings and the insight of a statesman, with all the cardinal qualities of a born and master administrator; few parliamentarians and politicians have, and have in such abundance, the instincts and ingredients of true statesmanship; advents of statesman are, like angels', few and far between; specially in a country, under the yoke of a foreign power,—the reins of whose policy and Government are controlled by an all-powerful autocracy—where all the high and important offices of state, not to speak of administrative posts, are monopolized by a foreign bureaucracy—



offices that are at once the training ground for, and supply suitable opportunity of displaying, statesmanship; in such a country the real and actual statesman is bound to be conspicuous by his absence. For almost all the opportunities, avenues and vantage grounds are closed to the children of the soil; so that even the born statesman must remain unnamed; and all his inborn qualities and acquired virtues that might have made a glorious page in the history of a country, independent and democratic, must be wasted for the lack of proper field and scope. Alas! this is the tragedy of a subject country, this must be the penalty of her loss of freedom and liberty. And India, which has produced quite a galaxy of illustrious men in almost all the walks of life, in almost all the departments of human activity and thought, India, today, can boast of few, very few, great statesmen—not to speak of commanders and generals (we are however not concerned with the latter)—not that, there is an inherent defect in the present day Indian character and constitution or any fundamental and deadly unsuitability in the soil; for there have come in our midst even in the prevailing state of political subjection, many prominent men whose statesmanship has received widespread recognition, but who had their, 'noble rage', the 'genial current of their soul,' suppressed by their sickening, deadening environment denying them proper field. But Asutosh was the exception that proves the rule; here



had the exceptional good fortune to be able to outclass the race of obscure statesmen, actual and potential. Born as he was with the essential elements of true and lofty statesmanship, he had these supreme natural gifts developed and he displayed them to great advantage; it was given to him to fight every inch of his ground by his sheer ability, perseverance and tenacity till he won a vantage ground from which he was able to give a good account of his statesmanship in furtherance of his country's cause and in realization of his heart's ideal. The sweeping changes, the far-reaching reforms in the higher educational system, the unheard-of expansion of the functions of the University and the broadening and heightening of its ideal that he made himself responsible for or a party to, the widespread diffusion of a higher and liberal education through the length and breadth of the land, the inauguration and working of the various departments of highest studies and researches which, by dint of the brilliant works of the scholars and teachers, bid fair to extend the bounds of knowledge and have actually made a profound impression in the cultural and intellectual world affording suitable outlets to the literary faculties and scientific tendencies of the young intellectuals and giving a great impetus to the cause of education and enlightenment, freedom and progress—all these are achievements that will certainly shed a lasting lustre upon any great statesman as a Minister of Education. Surely it is



not the high and exalted offices held by the principal ministers of State who, naturally enough, have in the hollow of their hands, the threads of public policy and all the initiative in a nation-wide programme but the great and fundamental qualities of true statesmanship that mark out a real statesman from a host of imposters and adventurers and narrow-minded politicians; or all the incumbents of the high offices would have been statesman, irrespective of their worth or absence of worth.

A statesman must rise above the noise and bustle of the present day politics and the din and dust of the current controversies; he is not generally confounded or overpowered—in his mind at any rate—by the clash of the conflicting interests or by the strifes of the contending parties of today; he is not solely guided by the present factors; but by dint of his imagination and foresight, courage and sagacity, he would take into his serious consideration the interests and needs of the unborn futurity also and shape his ideals as well as his courses of action accordingly. And Asutosh when he conceived his great Ideal and outlined his forward policy and progressive programme, which have scattered the forces of ignorance and prejudice and have brought the torch of knowledge and culture to a myriad homes, rich and poor, high and low—when he planned his bold scheme of reconstruction of the superstructure of the educational system



in Bengal and thus effected a speedy transformation of a mere examining body and degree-giving University into one of the greatest centres of intellectual activities and learning and scholarship and went on expanding its functions and ennobling its ideals, he had not had his gaze confined to the narrow limits of the circumstances of the day, his attention and his energies were not absorbed by the raging controversies, immediate needs and crying interests of the hour; but true and far-sighted statesman as he was, his angelic eyes and his gifted imagination pierced the veil that separates tomorrow from today; and he probed the unborn future, visualized its possibilities and realized in his mind the glory and greatness that could be and were achieved in the years to come.

At the dictates of true statesmanship which does not count too much upon immediate practical results nor is satisfied with the prevailing moribund state of things, but would advance courageously and cautiously, Asutosh left the beaten track of his predecessors; he set to translate his great policy of national progress and launched upon his great scheme of advancement of learning in its various stages and ramifications. And no one can seriously dispute the fact, that without being himself a great Minister or a responsible Official of State in the educational field—rather labouring entirely under the constant disadvantages of a subordinate position and under the statutory and administrative control



of the powers that were,—Asutosh accomplished in his own life much more than the record of all the contemporary Ministers and Members in charge of Education all over India. For, it is admitted on all hands that no province, no part of India can boast of such rapid and enormous strides that Bengal has made in the realm of higher education, in the domain of Letters and Science, thanks to the single-minded resolution, herculian energy and above all the sagacious statesmanship of Asutosh

At an early age while he was quite on the threshold of his career as an educational reformer and as an educationist, he fought—as we have already seen—very hard in the Senate for the introduction and recognition of his mother tongue in the curriculum; specially as the latter—Bengalee literature—was recently enriched by the brilliant works of various authors and poets; no doubt he was baffled on the occasion; but it was with a rare flash of imaginative insight—the characteristic quality of statesmanship—that he realized in his mind the immense possibilities of Bengalee Language and Literature and felt an imperative necessity of giving an impetus to the development, growth and healthy rise of our vernaculars, he never lost sight of the importance of giving all possible encouragement to the cause of our own literature which afterwards acquired a world recognition and had chairs installed in Oxford, London, Berlin and at other Universities of the world. With the unerring instincts of a



statesman he fully grasped the significant coincidence—and one might say, the invariable connection—between the rise of a people and the growth and enrichment of their vernacular; between the widespread diffusion of education and culture among all sections of the population and a considerable heightening of the standard of their living and broadening of their outlook on life and things; between the encouragement of higher studies and popularization of researches and a general elevation of the people; between intellectual ascendancy and awakening of the dormant spirit—in short between the march of education—specially higher education—in its various stages and a general amelioration of the peoples' conditions.

He flooded the country with an ever increasing stream of graduates and under-graduates, with a view to fulfil his ambition to bring every home in Bengal, under the uplifting influence of education and enlightenment; but with a long vision, which a real statesman can aspire to, he anticipated the disastrous consequences and enormous proportions of the growing unemployment and under-employment among the educated youths; he was quite alive to the keenness of the bread problem and struggle for existence ahead; and like a constructive statesman as he was, he grasped the fundamental idea of Co-operative organization of the young (on the lines laid down by Educational Colonies Association in



England), the possibilities of which Captain Petavel came out to explore in India. "Asutosh saw," let us quote from a recent article of the Captain, "that the above organization might give her (India) a thoroughly good system of education... solve the problem of middle class unemployment, give India the very best system of industrial development".

Further than that, he saw that it would put India 'on the way to freedom'. He founded a special department in the University and engaged Captain Petavel to study the problem instituting a thorough enquiry into the subject and the lectures of Captain Petavel as well many pamphlets he sent through out the world to eminent men, renowned journals as well as to various Universities for their opinion. Fortified with authoritative and expert opinion, he headed the Modern Co-operative Agricultural Association Ltd, formed to carry out the main idea of Captain Petavel's scheme and lectures—the idea, namely, that of forming the young into a co-operative productive organization and enabling them to be self-supporting by cultivation of the land in proper season. The part played by Asutosh in this movement, is held by men like Sir R. N. Mookerjee to be the most important and far-reaching of all his works. Surely it is worthy of the highest flight of statesmanship.

And none but those gifted with a prophetic vision and a remarkable wisdom—which only real



statesmen can lay claim to—could see things, as Asutosh did almost invariably, in their larger relations, in fuller significance and in truer light. It is quite true that most of the members of a community or a society do not and can not receive their education in, get their inspiration from, or win their laurels directly under the auspices of, the University; still the country or the society at large is greatly benefitted by the works and lives of those who come in direct contact with it; and the benefit can be easily traced 'to the training imparted by the University' and it is enjoyed by one and all without its being recognized. It is no doubt true that only an infinitesimal part of the population of our country, a microscopic minority—to use a hackneyed phrase—could directly participate in the 'advancement of learning' in its highest stage—in extending bounds of knowledge and the horizon of Truth—either as teachers or as students of the University; it is only the eminently intellectual and gifted among the educated few who can make enduring contributions to the march of Truth and Knowledge; and however varied and brilliant may be the products in the fields of original work and thinking—in the domains of Letters and Arts—the vast masses of the people in general in a country like ours live too solely to themselves, are too busy about their own petty, little affairs to be inclined or able to follow or care for, the learned works and theses, definite advancement in, and the cultivation by the



limited few of, the various intricate and learned subjects in the higher branches of study and researches. Not to speak of the vast masses of illiterate, uneducated or ill-educated people who, as a matter of fact, remain uninterested in, or unmoved by the activities of the University in the highest stages of its activities and developments, even educated people are found, as Asutosh pointed out in his remarkable speech at the Lucknow University Union, to question and deprecate the value of definite progress and original contribution in the realm of various antiquarian and abstract subjects such as, Anthropology, Ancient Indian History, Philosophy, Sanskrit, Pali, Zoology and others.

They might say, as he sarcastically put it, 'Dr. (Radhakumud) Mukherjee may have explored the Ancient Indian shipping; he may have extolled the glories of Ancient Indian Commonwealths, but these are not present day problems; they do not help the solution of the bread problem in the remotest degree;' so down with Dr. Mukherjee and his ilk. But he was firmly convinced that nations like individuals can not live, much less, thrive upon bread alone. To be great and glorious, prosperous and prominent, a nation must not neglect education and culture, Science and Letters in their highest forms—which it is the business of a great University to foster and encourage. With the makings and instincts of a true statesman, Asutosh held fast to these views, and he was in



excellent company; many, almost all the master-minds and thinkers of his country and of the world are at one with him in thinking that no nation can have an abiding and honourable place in the comity of nations unless it has some message, to deliver, something really grand to offer, something that may be the heritage of the whole human race, unless, that is to say, the nation can contribute to the forward march of human thought and add its quota to the sum-total of human knowledge and progress in Science and Letters; and this message, this contribution, this quota which constitutes its true right to enduring national glory and the key to national greatness, may relate to any department of human knowledge and Truth, to any sphere of scholarship and learning, and this purpose is precisely served by the Post-Graduate departments of the University in its proper developments and healthy working, wherein are carried on and encouraged highest studies and researches with a view to the extension of the bounds of knowledge and Truth. With a breadth of vision and clearness of perspective—which are cornerstone of true statesmanship—he was able to see the action and interaction, of the different departments of our body politic; he realized fully that encouragement and progress in one sphere of our thoughts and activities—say in that of Science and Letters—can not but affect, can not but react upon others and make in some way or other for the betterment of the conditions of the society



as a whole. Had he been born in an independent country and drawn to politics, his achievement as a statesman would have certainly been more striking, more monumental and more brilliant. But taking things as they were, it was nothing short of lofty statesmanship to read aright many of the signs of time—invisible to all but prophetic eyes—to have interpreted some of the important outward trends and tendencies as well as the inner currents and cross-currents of the Bengalee mind of today, to have gauged its innate longings for and love of knowledge and culture, to have anticipated and met the evergrowing, wide-spread and remarkable demands for popular and higher education and culture—which, as the Sadler Commission truly says, are 'one of the most impressive features of age'; no one but a far-sighted statesman could have judged and measured as he did, the potentialities and capacities of the Bengalee, and for the matter of that Indian, intellect and its eminent possibilities in the domains of higher and highest studies and researches. And the way in which he encountered and overcame the serious and onerous difficulties, the manner in which he laboured for the promotion and diffusion of higher education and championed the cause of original thinking and intellectual activities, making his 'alma Mater' a sanctuary of world's scholarship and culture—and all these, in the face of a world of difficulties and disadvantages, statutory and financial, of



criticism and hostility—were really worthy of any great statesman of the world.

But perhaps the most important act of statesmanship was his inauguration of the Department of Ancient Indian History and Culture and his persistent and systematic efforts to resuscitate interest in the neglected studies and researches into the domain of Ancient Indian History. His object was not merely to popularize this particular branch of higher study, he aimed at a much higher and greater object; while the politicians and public men—most of them at any rate—were wrangling over a short-cut to self-government and all of them wrestling with the authorities on political issues, Asutosh realized, with the keen and penetrating insight of a statesman, that a healthy renaissance and a timely internal reconstruction must be the enduring foundation of, and should be preceded by, a nation-wide political advancement and a change in the form and constitution of the Government; with the sure instinct of a farseeing statesman, he realized that we are an ancient people, with the threads of our life and culture, our ideals and institutions, rooted deep in the dim and distant past; but today we are in the midcurrents of the marching modern humanity—our natural seclusion destroyed once for all and ourselves dragged into the whirlpool of a powerful modern civilization, struggling under the tutelage of a great modern world-power. In



this current and cross-current of world affairs, in this forward march of modern humanity, India cannot afford to look on ; she can not be a pathetic spectator of the advancing, surging nations—far less can she be the footstool of a foreign power ad infinitum ; Asutosh felt and saw, with a prophetic vision, that India has yet to rise from her present degradation—she has yet a mission in the modern world—yet a message to deliver ; for this purpose she has got to be strong and healthy, vigorous and bouyant once more. But the onrush of foreign culture and foreign ideas are flooding and threatening to engulf her, and she finds herself a pray to a century-old process of devitalization with the dust and dirt of centuries accumulating on her social systems and life. Before she can seize her opportunity to deliver her goods, she must rise to the occasion at this crossing of ways and purge her of the ill eating into her vitals. She must find out the secret sources of health, the hidden reservoir of strength—she must find out the true direction of national progress in her own systems and institutions, in her own hoary culture and ancient history and must not rush to ape the West in the methods and institutions, in the ideas and ideals from which the heart of the West is bleeding. And the new Renaissance and reconstruction which only can be the basis of a greater and more glorious India must be grounded upon her own history and culture in order to bring about the consummation.



As Sir J. C. Bose strikingly said in an inspiring address recently, "The efflorescence of life is the supreme gift of the place and its association....." Professor Radhakrishnan also eloquently observed on an important occasion, "History is a mirror in which we see ourselves, not merely our outer forms as in a common glass but, if only we choose, our inner selves—we can find out strength as well as our weakness, the germs of life, growth and recovery as well as the malady which afflict us, we can discover why the products of a civilization which has lasted for nearly forty centuries are only half alive today." To accomplish this great object, to see our inner selves, to find out 'strength and germs of life, growth and recovery' Asutosh built for the first time, in modern India, the great department of Ancient Indian History and Culture. If to Gokhale belongs the glory of first striving for the spread of literacy and primary education for the teeming millions of India, Asutosh's must also be the glory of initiating and championing systematically the movement of study and researches into India's past with a view to explore the possibilities and build the superstructure of the future, and to raise her once more to a lofty pedestal of national glory and greatness.



CHAPTER XI.

The Administrator.

Administrative genius in a great jurist—Judge and scholar, a rare spectacle in life—Asutosh, the great administrator and the “miraculous man of action in the University—His unusual burden and tremendous responsibilities of his office in the abnormally critical periods in the annals of the University and of the country—the singular success of his tenure—Factors contributing to the difficulties of the office, nature of his duties and his tasks—His works enumerated—An estimate of his genius and his achievements as an administrator.

India has produced many great administrators in recent times, notwithstanding the protracted foreign domination and the consequent shutting of the doors of high offices and the closing of the avenues of administrative service—until lately, which are the best training ground for efficient administrators; many of her eminent sons have achieved remarkable success and fame in the sphere of administration of public affairs—specially in the semi-autonomous Native States, and Bengal, presenting as she does today, a sorry spectacle of emasculated, enfeebled and dying manhood, can, it seems a paradox claim not exactly the least share in this common glory and heritage. But a great jurist and Judge and a statesman of long vision and imagination on the one hand and an eminent and successful administrator—harmoniously blending in the



personality of a man of versatile scholarship and profound knowledge is a rare enough spectacle in life—the more so in the India of today; for the activities and thoughts running in these diverse and divergent departments of our life are always conflicting and often contradictory. To be a great Judge, one must be a great jurist at the first instance, and a jurist is but a master of the principles and theories of jurisprudence and law as also of the history of human institutions; to apply these principles and theories to the concrete cases and to judge the latter in the light of the former, a Judge—who is great as such—must have the requisite learning and knowledge of the history and psychology of the people he judges.

But learning, knowledge and scholarship divorced, as the Judges generally are from practical experience and exercise of executive functions in dealing with everyday affairs and practical problems of life, tend to make one speculative and theoretical. But a great administrator must be, above all, a practical man, alive to the present but not dead to the teachings of history and to the light of knowledge; unlike the judge and the jurist he has to guard against the speculative and theoretical, he must be equal to any situation that may crop up in actual life, he must master the intricacies and the details of a plan or scheme—while it is for the statesman to lay down the general lines of action, as well as the general principles and broader

policies and see that they are pursued. A great jurist, Judge and statesman as Asutosh was, it was given to him to possess, in a striking degree, all the qualities that go to make an eminent and successful administrator; indeed it is almost a truism to say that he was one of the greatest and ablest administrators that India has seen in recent times; and his unsurpassed administrative qualities are only equalled by his statesmanlike vision and sagacity, just as his intense idealism was only excelled by his keen and penetrating practical sense; and fortunately for our hero, his vast learning and his prolonged activities on the Bench were far from standing in the way of his success as an administrator; for though a profound student and a versatile scholar, his mind acquired a positive and not simply a theoretical bent by his study of exact sciences such as Mathematics, Physics and Law; and he dealt with, as he was master of, facts and figures and delighted in action as well as analysis. Nowhere more than in the administration of the affairs of his University—which was by far the principal scene of his activities—was to be seen ‘the miraculous man of action’—‘the greatest explosion of human energy’ in modern Bengal; for the University, his principal love, claimed, by far, the major share of his stupendous energies and his herculian industry.

As the most active and strenuous worker, as the central figure and the most important personality—for a generation and a half,—



as the executive head as well as the Chairman of various Committees and Boards and the permanent President of the Post-Graduate Councils in Arts and Science of the greatest, biggest and the most thriving and expanding University in India and in the East,—and these in critical periods of transition, of political agitation and popular excitement of unprecedented character, Asutosh had had an exceptionally busy and trying time of it. During his Vice-Chancellorship in two periods from 1906—14 and from 1921—23, the country was passing through a whirlwind of agitation and upheaval in the track of Anti-Partition and Non-co-operation Movements with their offshoots in the ‘national education’; every one at the head or in partial control and management of a corporate body had his energies and his patience, his tact and his courage, excessively taxed; for the movements were meant to sap the foundations of institutions established by the Government; Asutosh, too, had more than his share of troubles and tribulations, anxieties and worries—for a series of tremendous onslaughts and attacks was directed towards the University. During the dark days of the Partition and the stormy days of Non-co-operation, popular excitement ran to fever heat and the student population, always the most emotional and impressionable section of the community—and more so, in Bengal—joined the movements enthusiastically. It is not our purpose

to discuss the merits either of the steps they took, or of the movements into which they threw themselves wholeheartedly. But both the movements and the students' part therein increased thousand fold the usual and normal burden of the administrative head of the University; the fact was, the ordinary routine labour as well as the average intellectual work, the dangers and the difficulties of the position, the worries and the responsibilities of the Vice-Chancellor of the University were abnormally aggravated. The least negligence, the slightest indiscretion, hasty action or error of judgment on the part of a responsible administrator might act as a spark to let the individual and the institution he runs be caught in the conflagration raging around in these times. But Asutosh stuck to his post and steered his ship clear of the encompassing rocks and shoals, like a shrewd pilot, like a brave and seasoned navigator. No greater proof, no more positive evidence of his superb administrative genius could be given—and the courage and tact, resolution and resourcefulness that he displayed in these most momentous crises in the history of our University and of our country, are really the part of the highest statesmanship—than the fact namely, that under his administrative guidance, the University, for good or evil, withstood the sweeping onslaughts, and out of the fire, she came brighter, fuller and nobler. But the consequent tremen-



dous strain upon his patience and perseverance, upon his courage and wisdom; the excessive demand upon his physical endurance and working capacity and the ceaseless drain of his energy and vitality, caused by his administration of the University, would have surely crushed any other individual of his generation.

Dealing as he did, on the one hand with the student population greatly inflamed, with the community greatly agitated, and on the other, with a reactionary Government bent upon repression and retrogression, Asutosh had to play with fire; he had to decide quickly and act promptly and he joined the vision and sagacity of a great statesman to his unique industry and ability, his integrity and his practical wisdom, and all these were the real factors contributing to his eminence and his success as an administrator; these principal factors added to the cardinal fact that the University passed, in his regime and under his guidance, through the theories of a new birth and emerged out of a revolution of the governing ideas and principles, of accepted ideals and aims, and that the whole system of higher education was sought to be reconstructed on a new basis, made the position of the administrative head of the University more thorny, his responsibility more onerous, his duties more difficult and his tenure of office more eventful and more momentous. Let us quote his own inimitable words; referring to the first period of his stewardship from 1906-14



Asutosh said, "I also recall the magnitude and intensity of the political excitement which had, at that period, penetrated into the remotest corners of the land and added considerably to the intrinsic difficulties of educational reform under the most embarrassing circumstances." When he was called again to the helm of affairs at the University in 1921, "to crown all, political excitement of a formidable character saturated youthful minds at the most impressionable periods of their lives, seriously affected their discipline, shook to the foundations their faith in established law and order and like a whirlwind, swept them away from the peaceful avocations of the scholar. To shoulder the responsibility of management, at so critical a period in the life of a great University, steadily developing and expanding, was manifestly a hazardous adventure..." And the duties and responsibilities of, "the Vice-Chancellor—are not exactly light or unimportant under any circumstances; even the routine work of an uneventful period consumes much time and demands a good deal of patience, if nothing more—but in my case" said Asutosh, "the period of office has not only been unusually long, but it has imposed upon the business head of the University, an absolutely unprecedented burden of toil and responsibility."

His very first act, after assumption of office, was to help, as the President of a special Committee, in framing a complete set of new Regulations



dealing with all matters relating to the University, under the newly enacted Indian Universities Act. The magnitude of the task may be judged by the fact that the old Senate had failed to accomplish it even after an extension of the prescribed time. And no greater appreciation, no higher testimony could be given of the thoroughness, expedition and ability which the President and the members of the Committee brought to bear upon this difficult and delicate task than the fact the whole body of Regulation—comprehensive in their scope and diverse in their character as these were—was sanctioned by the Government of India in exactly the same form in which it emerged from the Committee. The next task that confronted him and that he applied himself to was even more exacting, more trying and tedious, and more protracted, just as its performance, remarkable and noteworthy. It was nothing but “to reshape the life and working of the University, on the basis of what has been settled in theory. The task was one to make even the most courageous and ambitious aspirant to the dignity of Vice-Chancellorship pause and consider...It would be difficult, hardly possible in fact, to characterise in one brief sentence, all the demands made by the Indian Universities Act, upon the Universities—through reorganization, reform, revolution, each of these words, would, in a way, be justified but would express one aspect only,... Reforms

SIR ASUTOSH MOOKERJEE—A STUDY.

of the most incisive kind had to be carried through every department of the University life ; demands formerly unheard of had to be made on all who claimed privileges in connection with the University ... The last eight years, in truth " proceeded Sir Asutosh in the course of his memorable Convocation speech in 1914, "have been years of unremittent struggle : difficulties and obstacles kept springing up like the heads of Hydra, each had been armed with sharp and often venomous fangs." Let us see what the greater and more distached, the superior body—the Government of India—have said on the difficulties and troubles of the period of transition. In the course of their lengthy Resolution on the subject in the Gazette of India, they expressed their considered judgment as follows : "The promulgation of those Regulations marks a notable advance in the movement for the extension and progressive development of the higher form of education—yet the stage thus reached is merely the starting point of the gradual process of reconstruction which will make large demands upon the energy and wisdom of the University authorities. The Regulations now sanctioned fill in the framework supplied by the Indian Universities Act. They provide the machinery for reform ; but they leave the Senate to put the machinery in motion." We have already had occasion to deal briefly with the character and process of those thorough 'reorganization,' reform, revolution,' which



might be 'designated as a new creation' and which 'had previously been hardly imagined and certainly not been attempted.' It is only necessary here to emphasise the exceptional nature of the difficulties, dangers and disadvantages, the extraordinary weight of the burden, and the immensity of the task that fell to the lot of the administrative head of the University, who had to work and guide and transform it in the light of newer ideals and higher conceptions in times of storm and stress.

The task was of so stupendous a character that it proved too much of a burden to Sir Lancelot Sanderson, even after the University was reconstructed and reorganised by Asutosh; another of his successors Sir Ewart Greaves feelingly referred to*, more than once and thoroughly recognised what a gigantic burden it was that Asutosh shouldered easily, cheerfully and selflessly year in and year out; and as Sir Ewart pointed out, Dr. Sadler and his colleagues on the Commission also bore eloquent testimony to his masterly administration of the University's affairs. Vast masses of details, the order of work, the constitution of new agencies, creations of new posts and new bodies, and modes of

* The University in all its branches and in every department bears the stamp of his work and of his individuality and it is only when one comes in close contact with the work of the University that one realises the stupendous burden which he bore for so many years....." Sir Ewart Greaves' Convocation Address 1925.



procedure had to be attended to; the very large and voluminous routine work, dry and dreary, as well as not unfrequent calls to grapple with new situations and developments that never failed to crop up now and then, unheard of expansions of the functions, heightening of the Ideal and broadening of the outlook of the University, taking the initiative and carrying into effect the great policies and programmes, the inauguration of the various new departments of studies and researches, the selection of the requisite staff, the smooth and harmonious working of the internal machinery and piloting the ship through unchartered waters and introubled times and save it from external attacks and internal disorder—these constitute a formidable enough catalogue, sufficient to crush all but exceptionally eminent administrators. And when one takes into his serious consideration that Asutosh was one of the most hardworked and erudite Judges of the Calcutta High Court, where his official work was of the most exacting nature, one simply marvels at the marvellous, working capacities and administrative genius of Bengal's miraculous man of action.

As we have seen Asutosh's administrative labours were not merely confined to the four walls of the University itself; from his place at the helm of affairs of the University, he had to take more than his share in the movement of reformation of the structure, and in improvement of the working of the whole system of education obtaining in the country; he



had to inaugurate and complete a survey of about 800 schools and 50 colleges scattered all over Bengal, Assam, Behar & Orrissa, Central Provinces and Burma, and what was a more difficult and more delicate task, he had to modify and restrict the extent of affiliation enjoyed by various institutions and to curb down their activities in order to bring them up to the standard contemplated by the Indian Universities Act; no doubt he set various agencies work to accomplish these; but in the overwhelming masses of correspondence to the numerous bodies ranging from the Government of India to the remotest village school and in the world of intellectual and physical labours entailed, his Roman hand could be easily traced; he was his own secretary and his own subordinate; he was not simply an administrative figure head; the nature, the temperament and the personality of the master-administrator would not let him depend solely upon others but would urge him to rise equal to the task and be master of the situation, however complex and difficult it might be; the fact was, he held in the hollow of his hand, all the threads of management and control; he had all the initiative and directive powers; he would himself work out, as he was always master of, the minutest details of a plan or scheme and nothing was too high or too low for him; on the one hand, he had a firm hold of the actualities of the today; on the otherhand, he was perfectly alive to the growing needs of the morrow as well



as to the more subtle, paramount factors and governing principles.

He knew his own mind as well as his own business and could express himself forcibly and act accordingly ; quickness of decision, firmness of determination, promptness of action, an abundance of courage and faith which are the essential elements of a great administrator were at his absolute command ; in the history of higher education and researches in modern India, his administration of the Calcutta University will surely stand out in prominent relief ; and the extraordinary ability, the really Herculean energy and patience, his unique capacity and aptitude for work, his unrivalled courage and practical wisdom, more than all these, his outstanding record and brilliant achievements—which his worst critics could not, would not minimise—will mark him out as one of the greatest and most successful administrators of India. What a great administrative genius he was will be all the more evident when one comes to his record and indicates his achievements in the domain of educational reform and in the direction of promotion of higher studies and researches ; it is clear to the meanest intelligence that an administrator of no ordinary type he was ; for, to his executive efficiency and administrative excellence, he joined his superb organizing capacity and constructive powers ; and in the preparation of the very exhaustive rules and new Regulations, in the creations of new and com-



plicated machineries and agencies, in the formation of the new Senate and the Syndicate, more strikingly in the establishment of the Post-Graduate Councils in Arts and Science, in shaping the numerous courses of studies and directions of researches, in moulding various great and small schemes of endowment—specially, the Palit, Ghosh and Khaira, which was fittingly admired by Lord Ronaldshay in his last Convocation Speech—in the inauguration and equipment of Colleges of Science and Law—in the great impetus to the movement of enlightenment and culture as well as in the extraordinary momentum of progress that the cause of higher and highest studies and researches received at his hand, in the extension of the bounds of knowledge, in the broadening of the horizon of Truth resulting therefrom, the marvellous powers of organization and construction and of persuasion as well as the miraculous capacity for work of the administrator can be traced to the best advantage. “To me it has always been a matter of astonishment”, said Dr. C. V. Raman on an important occasion “that it has at all been possible to bring together such a body of workers, to reconcile so many conflicting aims, ideals and interests and to create a homogeneous organization out of a mass of heterogeneous material. I am certain no one but Sir Asutosh Mookerjee could have essayed or successfully accomplished this great task.”



CHAPTER XII.

The Speaker.

Asutosh, one of the foremost speakers of his generation, but not a born orator—His great debating qualities and dialectical skill—Two of his typical speeches—His last Convocation Address at the Calcutta University, was memorable and historic—His speeches reveal the intellectual supremacy and inner calibre of the man—the nature of his eloquence—Asutosh, compared with some of the master orators of modern Bengal.

We have dwelt on many aspects of Asutosh's versatile personality and on his diverse activities and manysided interests; there still remain some aspects of his brilliant public life which made a profound impression upon, and swayed, his contemporaries, irrespective of caste, creed or colour, and contributed not a little to his success and his popularity—we mean his greatness as a speaker, as a friend of learning and scholarship and as a leader and ruler of men. It is almost a truism to say that Asutosh was one of the foremost speakers of his generation—if not the most effective and impressive; and the excellence of the speaker was characteristic of the man; but he was not a born orator like many of his eminent contemporary public men; moreover, not being a prominent political figure or a Member of Legislative Council for the best part of his life, he was not called upon to speak on the important questions of the day, off and on; and



almost all his striking speeches and addresses that attracted considerable attention, admiration or abuse, were delivered within the precincts of the Universities and dealt with educational questions.

But within his own sphere he was unrivalled and unsurpassed, the lack of variety notwithstanding; on educational problems and educational topics, no public man, no public speaker or politician, Indian or European, could excel him in the weight of authority, in the wealth of facts and figures, in the grasp of fundamental principles and governing ideals, in the clarity of vision and in the width of out-look, no less in the comprehensive survey. Great as he was, certainly, as a speaker, he was perhaps, greater as a keen debator and dialectician; and it was a really treat to hear or read him advocating his viewpoint or smashing that of his opponent; next to his commanding personality and massive intellectual powers, his superb debating powers and dialectical skill, his brilliant advocacy and his compelling eloquence were the principal factors in the consolidation of his strength and his popularity in life and in acquirement of his ascendancy over all sorts and conditions of his fellowmen. A consummate lawyer and advocate of the first water, a master of his language and of his own vigourous, inimitable style and powerful diction, he would support his case with his great eloquence and persuasive skill, or overwhelm his opponents with his strength of arguments, force of expression, and with a never-ending stream



of facts and figures, much like a giant flowering a pigmy. It is not possible to do justice, or even to casually refer to all or most of his important speeches and addresses; we believe we might deal with two of his speeches as being fairly typical—one that he delivered at a meeting of the Senate of Calcutta University, brought to verge of starvation and stoppage of its functions owing to the refusal of the Government of Lord Lytton to lend the state aid which it was its due. It is impossible not to be moved by the indomitable spirit of patriotism and resistance, and the unbending attitude and iron determination to stand by the University and save its limited autonomy from the misdirected and mischievous zeal of a reactionary Government, that found forceful expression in it; and the note struck by Asutosh in the conclusion touched the tenderest chord of every Bengali, nay of every Indian, heart; the clarion call of appeal, the call to freedom and manliness sounded by him is unique and almost without parallel in the tragic history of India's subjection to Britain. "You give me slavery with one hand and money with the other," said he, "I despise the offer. I will not take the money. We shall retrench and live within our means. We shall starve, we will go from door to door, throughout Bengal. I will ask my Post-Graduate teachers to starve their families but to keep their independence; I tell you, as members of this University, stand up for the right of the



University. Forget the Government of Bengal. Forget the Government of India. Do your duty as Senators of this University, Freedom first, freedom second, freedom always." One of his learned brothers on the Bench of the Calcutta High Court feelingly referred to this glorious doctrine of 'freedom' first, freedom second and freedom always', and prophesied that it would go down to posterity as a great 'national asset' full of self-respect and dignity; this speech of Asutosh revealed the 'Bengal Tiger', and recalled the Risis of yore, begging from far and near for their 'assrams' the home of India's beautiful ideals of education and culture in ancient times. His Lucknow speech dealt with the burning question of the day in educational politics—the control claimed by the Ministers and the Legislature over the affairs of the Universities; we have already quoted from this speech and we need not do so again; suffice it to say that Asutosh proved to demonstration the hollowness, almost the hypocrisy of the monstrous claim and the utter futility and inherent weakness, of the proposition; it took the house by surprise and showed his superb dialectical skill and his brilliant advocacy. Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjee, the renowned explorer of Ancient Indian History and head of the Department of Economics and Sociology Lucknow, wrote about it as follows: "we saw him at his best as he set about handling the topic with free air and manner of a giant flooring a pigmy. The audience was spell-bound by the finest display



imaginable of debating powers and parliamentary oratory. It was his intellectual supremacy, his powers of advocacy, his unrivalled grasp of facts and figures and precedents bearing upon his case that enabled him to wield a public meeting as one man's show". The addresses that he delivered on the occasions of Convocations of the Universities of Calcutta, Mysore, Lahore, Lucknow, were all remarkable but his addresses at Calcutta, in 1914, 21 and 22 as well as those delivered at Mysore and Lahore were more striking; he unburdened his soul freely at Mysore and expounded what should be an ideal University; at Lahore, he emphatically declared himself against the disruptive tendencies of Non-co-operation movement and strongly expressed his aversion and his indignation at the students leaving their natural avocations, to join, and at the call of, the movement; both these addresses evoked a good deal of comment and made a stir in the press—specially, the latter was highly applauded by the Anglo-Indian journals as a make-weight against the sweeping onrush of Non-co-operation. But memorable and fighting to a degree was his last Convocation Address at Calcutta; for the pungency and vehemence of its profuse sarcasm, the force and dignity of its expression, and what was more, for its irresistible attack on, and its knock-out blow at, the official attempt to snatch the autonomy and integrity of the University under cover of reform, for the unassailable ground that he maintained in it and the



passionate fervour of its soul-stirring appeal in the end,—and it is no exaggeration to say that he threw his very soul out into it—it will rank among the most memorable and heroic feats in the India's struggle for freedom.

We have already referred to his very short career in the Imperial Council; his speeches on the floor of the legislature on the Indian Universities Bill won him universal recognition and established his pre-eminence as an effective speaker and a keen debator. But at the advent of the Angel of Death, the skillful debator and dialectician as well as the consummate advocate and parliamentarian in him has vanished once for all; none the less his more important speeches and addresses that were delivered on various occasions reveal the man in his intellectual supremacy, in his exuberance of energy and enthusiasm, in his contempt for untruth and enertia, in his undaunted courage and undying faith, in his robust optimism and soaring idealism, in his vast learning and encyclopedic knowledge. Like his massive intellect and manly spirit, his speeches lacked the ornamental style and the poetic touch; they appealed more to the intellect than to the sentiment of the readers; no doubt, sometimes they touched the hearts of his hearers and stirred their emotions as when he gave eloquent expression to his conception of the glorious ideal and functions of his 'alma mater', or when, seer-like, he unburdened his mind as to the great



destiny of his motherland to be realised through the life and working of the Universities ; but here again, he would harp upon the tune of the intellect and not hammer on the popular sentiments and emotions ; the keynote of his speeches would be predominantly intellectual, reaching its climax—as his famous Convocation speeches of 1914 and 1923 did—through an emotional ecstasy. This appeal to our highest emotions and noblest sentiments, rising above an intellectual back-ground, was striking and in this, he has been seldom surpassed.

It is difficult to indicate in a rough and ready manner, what exactly the speeches of a great speaker are like ; and it is a truism—but it will bear repetition—that they have to be read in order to be appreciated ; hence no appreciation is possible, that is worth the name, without a careful study. A hero of action, a practical man of affairs as Ashutosh was—and he achieved immense success in the world—he would go straight to his subject-matter ; he would often leave beaten track ; instead of confining his remarks to the strict limits of his immediate theme he would, on important occasions, take a wider survey and make a more general review ; and by enunciating many broad principles and illuminating truths, interwoven into his speeches, he would add to their interest and value. His style was plain and dignified, his diction was polished and his mastery of his theme was unique ; his eloquence had much of the majesty of



a mighty river flowing onward and onward, carrying with it a peculiar force and an irresistible appeal. Ashutosh had not the poetic vein, the fine imagery and sublime emotionalism that characterised the great addresses and preoration of Annanda Mohan Bose ; surely he lacked the superb oratorical gifts, the beautiful and the forceful periods of Surendra Nath Banerjea ; nor can any one claim for him the chiselled diction, the literary flavour, the wit and beauty of expression and variety and subtlety of thought that place the speeches of his guru—Rash Behari Ghose—besides the best products in English Language ; and his speeches do not possess—though his last Convocation Address may be said to approach—the poignancy of spirit, the brilliance of sarcasm, the force of ridicule, the sharpness of reparties and the dash and smashing eloquence that were the characteristic features of Lall Mohan Ghosh's speeches in the famous Ilbert Bill controversy. But when all is said and done, the depth of his learning, the range of his review, the width of his survey, the dignity of thought and loftiness of sentiment, the pervading spirit of idealism and faith, the moving eloquence and manly style, the many sparkling truths and broad principles scattered throughout, the conception and nobility of the Ideal and, lastly the intellectual note and forceful appeal, make his speeches and addresses a great national asset.



CHAPTER XIII.

The Friend of Learning.

Ashutosh, the greatest friend of the scholars and the students—His love of learning knew no 'scientific frontier' nor his encouragement of scholarship and talent any artificial barriers—He not only nationalized but internationalized his University—His discouragement of 'the principle of nationality' and his catholicism and universalism in higher study and research—He upheld the grand democratic doctrine of Napoleon—His exertions for the scholars and students.

Himself a reputed, and versatile scholar and a great lover of learning and culture—one who had, in the inimitable words of 'Ditcher' in the Capital, "the vast erudition comprising all the humanities which marked the Bengali jurist and educationist as a man among men," Ashutosh was the very greatest friend of the scholars and patron of learning. The Sanskrit title of 'Saraswati' or 'Goddess of learning' that was conferred upon him was not simply an ornamental appenage to his name but served to indicate his real greatness in this respect. He had a peculiar knack—one might go further and say, he had almost a hobby—of gathering round himself the best intellect and select few in field of letters and science—not only from among the younger generation but also from the great savants, the profound thinkers and famous intellectuals of his own country, as well as from various seats of learning.



in Europe and America. As we have already seen, his University was the veritable confluence of the currents and cross-currents of world's cultures, and the meeting place of world's learning; at his instance and under his patronage, the variegated cultures of India representing the various elements of her civilization, equally with the foreign scholarship from the remotest parts of the globe, had their honoured place in the temple of learning that the University was converted into for the first time in its history. To use a happy metaphor of Lord Curzon, his love of learning and patronage of the scholars, acknowledged no 'scientific frontier'; his unbounded enthusiasm and ceaseless active sympathy for scholarship and erudition, and his warm encouragement of literary talents and scientific genius, knew no barriers, sectarian, communal or national. He would befriend the scholars and the students in their hundreds and thousands—irrespective of class, creed or colour, and if possible, let his country profit by their association and their labours.

The trends and tendencies of world-thought, today are, decidedly against monopoly of learning and scholarship; and the better minds of the world and the thought-leaders of the peoples are anxious not simply to nationalise but to internationalize them; and one of the greatest needs of humanity, is not only a nationalization, but also internationalization and humanisation, of knowledge as an antidote to



sectarian, national and international jealousies and enmities that have reduced civilised man to a sorry pass. Dr. Brojendra Nath Seal put in a vigorous and eloquent plea in this behalf, only the other other day at Bombay. But so far as Asutosh was concerned, he almost anticipated the subtle march of the movement for internationalization of knowledge and learning; as the greatest friend of the learned and patron of scholarship in India, he did not content himself with merely nationalizing his University which is a really thriving 'national institution', but went further and went forward to internationalize his 'alma mater' by engrafting scholars of various nationalities and religions on to his staff and by welcoming savants from all parts of the globe within its sacred precincts. There are few Indian patriots who have served their country and sacrificed for her cause, to a greater extent, than Asutosh did in sphere of education; but the patriot in him seldom got the better of the friend of scholarship and learning that he delighted to be throughout his life; and as we have just said, nationality or religion was no bar to him, and never interfered with his choice or with his appointment of the Readers and Professors in the republic of Letters and Science that he really converted his University into; he was not, however, free from adverse comments and criticism for preferring peoples of different countries to his own countrymen, no matter, the former might be of superior



intellectual attainments and greater fame and erudition.

But Asutosh never swerved an inch from the path chalked out by his love of learning and scholarship; "some patriotic men", declared he in the course of a Convocation speech, "have told me that these Professorships should, as a matter of course, all go to Indian scholars. My answer was and ever will be that these Professorships should as a matter of course, go to the best qualified men. The principle of nationality is to be deprecated altogether in matters of higher learning and research." The cardinal feature and the striking characteristic of this love of learning and patronage of scholarship were that they were enlightened, liberalized and and cosmopolitan. He loved and fought for the recognition and betterment of his own vernacular; but this love of his, for his mother tongue, intense as it was to a degree, did not lessen his sympathy with, or whole-hearted efforts for, the development and upliftment of other Indian vernaculars such as Marathe, Burmese, Assamese, Telegu, Guzrati; similarly his love and solicitude for Indian vernaculars failed to diminish his interests in, or his consideration for other Asiatic languages and literatures, the Chinese, Japanese and Tibetan which were accorded their proper place in the curriculum. His unbounded enthusiasm for the classical literatures of India, Sanskrit and Pali, embodying as they do, some of the noblest and



highest products of human genius, in poetry, drama, philosophy, grammar and theology never took away from his admiration of the classical languages and literatures of the West; his keen and ardent solicitude on behalf of various schools of the great Indian Philosophy did not mar his respect for the European Philosophy, ancient and modern, in their numerous schools. His eagerness for the reconstruction of ancient Indian history which would depict the various phases and different elements and branches of ancient Indian culture and civilization did not stand in the way of his proper appreciation of the march of Modern Thought and Criticism and of the unprecedented advance of Science which have their birth place in the West.

The number of students and scholars who came under direct obligation to him is a legion, not to speak of thousands who were indirectly benefitted by or through him. He himself sought out impoverished scholars and took them under his protecting wings, giving them every facility for the development of their capacities and their intellects. No one felt more keenly the dearth of opportunities and scarcity of scope in our country—specially before his regime—for research work and original thinking, and he literally moved heaven and earth to create the favourable circumstances and helpful atmosphere for these intellectual activities by all sorts and conditions of scholars and students; he was a confirmed advocate of, as he strenuously worked for, and



translated into action ; in the domain of Letters and Science, at any rate, the magnificent democratic doctrine of Napoleon that in every society there must be scope for talent ; it is no exaggeration to say that not a single meritorious student or talented scholar came back from him, disappointed ; and it was the easiest thing in the world to draw his sympathy ; once his sympathy was drawn, one could count upon it always and he would extend it through good report and evil ; he would never hesitate, never grudge nor fret, but give his very best to the students and scholars taken under his protection. And when his University for whose welfare and prosperity he had sacrificed his health and vitality, even the chances of his study and research, was threatened with closing of its doors through the persistent refusal of the custodians of the public funds to lend the legitimate support, the indomitable lover of learning and patron of scholarship was at his best and declared in all solemnity that he would go abegging for his 'Alma mater' but would not give up its birthright—its limited autonomy. And whatever verdict posterity may give upon his brilliant career and his diverse achievements, there is absolutely no difference of opinion that he will be regarded as, as he is surely entitled to be, the greatest friend of scholarship and patron of learning in modern India.



CHAPTER XIV.

The Leader.

Asutosh, a born leader, in the higher sense of the term—A reformer is always a leader—His abiding qualities as a leader, the peculiarity of his environment and of the field of his leadership—a ruler of his fellow men, he was no mass-leader like Lokamannya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi—Instances of his superior leadership—He was a thought-leader of his people, and a guide to future generations.

A great representative man as he was of his country, Asutosh was a born leader in the higher sense of the term—a leader of thought and ruler of men. There are great men, no doubt, who live their lives apart, away 'from the madding crowds' ignoble strife', who play their part in the life-drama, in their quiet, unassuming, and unostentatious way; but the role of a reformer, of a great man of action, of a strenuous and struggling national worker determined to rise into eminence and destined to success, must take him through the crowded walks of life, through the hot beds of popular excitements and emotions and will bring him face to face with the popular passions; he has, as matter of course, to come across and encounter accepted ideals and aims, prevailing ideas and notions; and the reformation of the existing state of things, or the construction of a new structure in place of the old and the worn out ones, requires a revolution in the realm of ideas at the



first step, as well as the necessary ingredients of construction ; with a view to accomplish this end the reformer and the worker have to direct, mould and control the thoughts and ideas of the people ; he has to carry his fellow men with him in his bold work ; to achieve his object thoroughly, to be a successful reformer in active life, one must be a leader ; in fact a true reformer in any sphere of human activity and thought is a leader ; even a reformer who is misunderstood and not appreciated in his life time, one whose reforming zeal and activities bear fruit after his death, in the near or distant future is also a leader of men ; for by his words and thoughts, he guides and shapes and influences the ideas and actions of his posterity.

As a leader of men, Asutosh was much applauded, appreciated and even hero-worshipped ; at the same time he was much misunderstood, much maligned and abused, as the great leaders of public opinion and thought generally are all the world over ; he was not a man of baser metal, however ; he had the statesman's imagination, a statesman's courage of conviction and prescience ; the urge of patriotism and the thirst for services and sacrifice were always keen within him ; so his leadership was that of a man of superior calibre and higher nature and does not fail to influence his posterity, as it did not surely, his contemporaries ; thanks to his nature and his temperament, he had in abundance, the necessary ingredients of superior leadership ; not only did



he tower head and shoulders, much like the Colossus over his contemporaries and compatriots in the massiveness and range of his intellectual powers, the strength of his moral and physical stamina, in the rare versatility of his personality, and in the depth of his encyclopedic knowledge; but his leadership had something of the extraordinary, something singular, something grand about it. In an independent country, leadership goes almost as a matter of course, to the great statesmen and orators, to generals and admirals and the nations' parliament always provides the best training ground for leaders who are most of them, great parliamentarians in the West; some of them, no doubt win their leadership in the field of battles or at high sea. But a subject country like India, without the system of parliamentary Government, without proper facilities for military and naval enterprise and adventure, can not provide the field for the growth and display of leadership in these directions, so the arena of politics and public life—the press, the platform, and the legislature—constitutes the only place for leaders to shine in.

But a high official of the state—one of His Majesty's Judges—that he was for the greater part of his public life, Asutosh had the gates of the political arena—the nursery of leadership—shut against him; he had to prepare his own ground in a sense and his 'alma mater' afforded the medium.



through which did he choose to lead the educated and intellectual sections of his countrymen ; it goes without saying that in the University and among those who stands for it, none but a man of outstanding ability and towering personality would establish his influence and maintain his sway ; the very character, the constitution, and composition of the University are a stumbling block to and forbid, mediocre leadership ; under the Indian Universities Act of 1904, eighty per cent of the members of the Senate are nominated by the head of the Government ! and though the Senate was meant to have a predominance of academic element, other interests have got to be represented thereon ; even the academic element is far from being a stereotyped one—it is itself representative of various institutions and interests ; no wonder the University and the Senate have proved the grave of many reputations ; distinguished officials and public men have found it too dangerous a rock to steer clear of, easily. This remarkable assembly representing as it does flower of Indian and European scholarship and intellect—with an overwhelming majority of nominated members—Ashutosh, wielded, swayed, ruled and lorded it over for a generation, in a manner which has no parallel in the history of public bodies and public life of the country. He was, no doubt, a prominent figure on the floor of Council Chamber at Calcutta and at Simla (for a shorttime only) as well as in the Corporation.



of Calcutta where his lead in matters educational were accepted ; but there he could not be said to have reached the height of power and influence ; hence it was the University to which he had been attracted from early years, that supplied the great leader his materials as also his arena to work on.

In the University itself, though he made his presence felt from the very beginning, his leadership had not come too soon ; it was not until the days of Lord Curzon's Universities Commission and Universities Bill that his unique knowledge of life and working of his and other Universities, his unceasing interest in the former's affairs and his tireless activities in its behalf won him the extraordinary influence and sway not only in the University circles but also among increasing numbers of his educated countrymen ; indeed his contribution to the debate on Universities Bill—which was characterised by his thorough knowledge of the requirements of the higher education, his firm grasp of the principles and factors involved in the new legislation as well as his unrivalled mastery of the facts and figures concerning the working and administration of the University—established once for all his claim to the leadership of his countrymen in matters educational ; his part in framing the new Regulations as well as his conducting the deliberations, and bringing to a happy and successful termination, the important labours of the Committee appointed by the



Government of India, after his installation at the helm of affairs at the University, marked the final stage in the acquisition of his authority and in the consolidation of his leadership in educational questions and policies; henceforth, both the Government and the people had to bow to his authority and acknowledge his sway.

Truly he did not lead his followers—bound to him with no party ties or claims—into the division lobbies; but he occupied such an enormous space in the life of the University—as also in the public life of the country, for the matter of that—he dominated it to such an extent, that he was said by Lord Lytton, to be the University itself much in the same manner in which Louis XIV was the State himself. His immense intellectual supremacy, his attractive personality at once dominating and fascinating, his engaging manners, his powers of advocacy, his transparent simplicity and selflessness combined to place his leadership of his fellow countrymen in a vital sphere of life, on an enduring foundation and on the other hand, paved the way for what may be called his dictatorship in, and his autocracy over, 'the democracy of the Calcutta University.' He had no statutory claim to the never-failing and unqualified support of the Senate or even the Syndicate; his influence, his authority and his power rested on the suffrance of the Fellows; not to speak of the Syndicate, he always enjoyed and commanded the



unalloyed and unconditional allegiance of the Senate, representing 'the most intellectually advanced community in India'; and when it is remembered that the Senate contains the flower of the educated manhood and scholarship of the country, the eminence of the leader becomes all the more apparent.

Asutosh had little of the all too common leader of the market place; he was, as we have already said, no ordinary leader, who plays to the gallery or ministers to the vanities and pleasures of the powers that be; but he was really a leader of leaders—a thought-leader of his people and ruler of men. His sway over his fellow men knew no bounds of race or religion; among eminent savants and scholars, administrators and public men, European and Indian, men who came in contact with him, few could resist the charms of his dynamic, commanding and attractive personality; the way in which he would and could dominate important Committees and Commissions was nothing short of a marvel and has few parallels in the annals of the public life of the country; it can only be compared with the wonderful leadership of Pandit Motilal Nehru in Legislative Assembly and of Deshabandhu Chittaranjan in the Bengal Council, wherein with an insufficient following, less than a third of the total strength, they were the most dominating personalities and the most important factors. Such was the case with Asutosh,



also and in a greater degree; he was called upon to preside over three important Committees in which there was a preponderance of experts and administrators, in fact, of official element; Dr Ziauddin Ahmed and he were the only Indian Members of Dr. Sadler's Commission with a majority of official and British Members; he served, along with Dr. Raman, on the Committee appointed to report on the Bangalore Institute of Science; Asutosh's genius for rule which in the words of 'Ditcher' in the Capital, 'marked the Bengali jurist and educationist as a man among men'—manifested itself in his sway over his colleagues on, and in shaping the course of the reports and the deliberations of, these committees and commissions; it is no disparagement to his colleagues, to say that the reports and conclusions of the latter bear unmistakably and remarkably, the marks of his Roman hand; often his colleagues, on the various committees, on the Senate and the syndicate, were simply charmed by him, often he could treat a public meeting as a one man's show by dint of his superior leadership.

But he was no mass-leader like Lokamannya Tilak or Mahatma Gandhi, he had no occasion to sway or lead the masses of his country men; he did not take any prominent part in mass movement; he had nothing to do with the freaks and fury of popular passions and emotions in the masses of people; he had chalked out his own course



and he trod and led on along that line. As we have already said, in his apparently narrower and restricted field he stood supreme; he was brave, selfless, active, strong, and uncompromising on questions of national honour and vital principle, he never feared or cared for, the favours of the rulers of the land; he criticised the Government, mercilessly exposing the hollowness of their policy and actions; he stood as a rock—for he was firmly convinced he was in the right—against popular passions and excitement and was bold enough to resist the sweeping onrush of the mighty Non-co-operation Movement; thus was he a true leader, always acting, according to the lights that were in him. "The true leader" said Lord Haldane in a striking address, "must teach to his countrymen the gospel of the wide outlook, he must bid them live the larger life, be unselfish be hopeful, be reverent. He must fill the minds of those who hear him, even of such as are in the depths of national despair, with the sense of the greatness which human nature is capable..." Time and again Asutosh's clarion voice was thundered and was echoed and re-echoed from one end of the country to the other proclaiming the 'gospel of wide outlook'; the vision of larger, truer and fuller life, the Ideal of national greatness and national prosperity that he dreamt and that haunted him in his waking hours and in his nightly rest, he held before his countrymen and bade them live up to it; and when the



whole country was prostrate, and the people was bleeding and groaning under the weight of thousand and one wants and woes, and when the very life, the spirit and hope were sought to be knocked out of them, his lofty idealism and his robust optimism, his faith in himself and in this country's future never flagged; he instilled new vigour and new energy into his people and showed what human nature was capable of in the intellectual sphere, in the domains of Letters and Science. And when, deserted by the official head of the University, and the glorified Ministers and the representatives of the people in the Council Chamber, forsaken by the custodians of public funds, he stood alone with the banner of progress in hand for the independence and integrity of his alma-mater, he displayed the supreme qualities of leadership which sticks to its post and carries on, against enormous odds, to win in the long run.

Apart however, from this superior leadership in a critical period in his country's history, Asutosh was pre-eminently a thought-leader of his people. The great ideal of a national greatness that he dreamt and sought and fought all his life to realize in the realms of Letters and Science, the excellent way in which he planned and were at pains to work out the salvation of his country through intellectual regeneration and educational progress, the ideas and the spirit of higher studies and researches that he fostered, made irresistible appeal to the



better mind of his people ; and the advanced sections of his countrymen, the new generations of scholars and students accepted them with alacrity and are carrying on his work and holding to his message ; in his own words 'the sparks of new inextinguishable fire' that he kindled ; spread far and wide and the sister Universities of India were 'eager to emulate his example' ; as Dr. Ganga Nath Jha, Vice-Chancellor, Allahabad University, said, his 'ideal was accepted to serve as a guide ; his ideas and aims gained grounds and found champions through the length and breadth of the land ; all the movements for higher education were and are influenced, for good or evil, by them. The Universities newly established at various parts of the country, more or less accepted his ideals, and can be said to work or enlarge, or modify his ideals and his aims ; and many of the institutions invited him to bless their infant enterprise with his inspiring presence, his encouraging words and sage counsel. Now that he is dead and gone, his ideals of the 'advancement of learning', the principles underlying his plan of the expansions of the functions of our University, and his schemes of the Post-Graduate studies, his conception of the goal and place of the University in our national life have come to stay. The brilliant galaxy of intellectuals, scholars and and public men, the masses of mediocrity and of the articulate population that he directly or indirectly led, ruled or swayed, will be no more in not very distant future ; but with the ideals



he championed, with the aims and objects he fought for, with the great ideal he conceived and bequeathed, and with the lustre of a glorious life lived—a life of service and sacrifice, a life devoted to work and action, to freedom and patriotism—Asutosh will lead on the generations yet unborn, 'like the star from where the Eternal are'.



CHAPTER XV.

The Patriot.

Patriotism was the breath of his nostril—A subject country has little scope for patriots—Government service is the grave of patriotism, Asutosh an exception to the general rule. The nature of his patriotism,—not politics, but his University claimed his energies—The negative aspect of his patriotism, he was a Bengali of Bengalis and an Indian of Indians —The positive side of his patriotism, his unique sacrifice on the alter of his University, 'the handmaid of our 'common motherland'—The call of his country swept the thinker and the scholar and the intellectual giant—His grand sacrifice and patriotic labours.

If, from the present generation of his countrymen Asutosh did not receive his due as an erudite and versatile scholar, as a man of profound original thinking and intellectual powers, as a great constructive statesman and idealist, he had his share of recognition as a patriot, as a Judge and jurist, —no less, as an administrator of the very first water. Like idealism and like freedom, in a larger sense, patriotism was the breath of his nostril ; it was, as we might say, the cardinal theme of his life-drama, the corner-stone of his character, the key-note of most of his thoughts, one of the powerful and all-pervading principles of his life—its guiding, its controlling star ; as patriot, he was altogether on a higher plane ; his patriotism stood on a different footing from that of a host of his



fellow creatures. In a country under a foreign subjection like ours, the field of the patriot, the scope of his activities as well as his opportunities, are limited to a degree; he has, of necessity, to tread a narrow and restricted path; he has to follow a stereotyped course; his thoughts and his activities must, in most cases, flow in old, familiar, matter-of-course channels. In an independent and democratic country where there is no artificial inferiority, where the systems of Government and administration do not generate a slave mentality among, or dwarf, the people in general, the highest public office affords the largest scope to the patriot. Not so in a subject land where the individual as well as the national interests of the rulers and the ruled are not identical, not even compatible with each other but are often antagonistic; and the path of a patriot is strewn broadcast with difficulties and bristles with dangers, known and unknown.

Hence the dearth of true and broad-minded patriots in our midst; moreover, the future prospects and promotion, accession of powers and privileges all depend upon the pleasures of the rulers whose interests are not, as we have just said, identical with ours; and for the sake of the former, the native incumbents of public offices have to advance the latter's interest very often hence Sir Henry Cotton once said; An 'Indian member of Civil Service is an Indian lost to the country';



it is, it may be, taking an extreme view of the matter, but the fact can not be gainsaid that the intricate machinery of the Government—the pernicious system of administration—tends everywhere to make the individual in the Government service so much a part and parcel of the machine or of the system that his individuality, his personality—is totally merged therein. The individual dies but the system reigns. It is, no wonder, therefore, almost all our countrymen in higher or lower rung of the ladder in Government service have been more or less completely captivated or consumed by their offices; one must, therefore look for ardent, active, selfless patriots besides the rank of officials and officers of the Government. There have been some Indians, however, who are the exception to the general rule, who, rising superior to their environment, have given ample proof of their unbounded patriotism, the pomp, and power, the glamour and grandeur of their high offices, notwithstanding: In the roll of prominent public men and patriots who have held high offices under an alien Government, the name of that illustrious son of India—Mr. Justice Madhav Govind Ranade comes first; Mr. Justice Telang was also one of the foremost patriots and public man of his time; nearer home, we have had several of the most brilliant and distinguished of our countrymen taking to Government service—Vidyasagor, Bankim Chandra, Nobin Chandra and others; in more recent



times, the late Mr. R. C. Dutt in the Superior Executive Service and the late Sir Guroodas Banerjea on the Bench of the Calcutta High Court,—though they were pre-eminent in their official careers—were known and respected all over the land as great patriots. Such was also the case with Ashutosh; he and his race proved to demonstration the capacity of their fellow countrymen to hold with credit the highest offices of State but they are among the most prominent patriots that India has seen, their lifelong association with the machinery of the Government notwithstanding.

As one of the ornaments of the highest Court in India, Asutosh had to devote the best of his intellectual powers and energies in the due discharge of the exacting duties of his exalted judicial office—in so doing he left indelible marks of his rare erudition and independence—but he escaped the general contamination. Happily for their own judicial temper and legal acumen as well as their superior moral and intellectual stamina, the prominent lawyers and jurists who are translated to the Bench escape the inevitable doom; and it was only natural that the high office failed to make the man—our hero—a part of the machine. The inborn, sensitive and selfless patriot in him burned with intense thirst for service and sacrifice; and his superior official position—which is ordinarily the be-all and end-all of the vast majority of his fellow-creatures—failed to chain



him to it, its honour and emoluments, its fame and prestige, its glamour and glitterings notwithstanding. And he was singled out by Providence from the galaxy of his official compatriots for the singular glory of placing at the altar of his motherland the best of his gifts and of devoting most of his waking hours in the furtherance of her sacred cause in a manner unique in her annals in recent time. For nearly a generation and a half, from his early youth, he served his country through his 'alma mater', championing the cause of popular education and culture, of higher studies and researches, bringing the torch of light and enlightenment to hundreds and thousands of homes, humble and great, rich and poor. His activities, in this direction, were simply a marvel to others and his enthusiasm, his patience, his courage knew no bounds ; he never spared himself, never slackened his efforts ; he never lessened his devotion ; he did not give himself any rest ; even while asleep, he was haunted by the dreams of his activities and his works ; and the busiest and most active man as he was, his waking hours were not also altogether free from day-dreams in which his plans and schemes of his labours loomed large. Like the late Lokamannya Tilak, Mr. Gokhale and Deshabandhu, Asutosh joined all his unique intellectual and moral powers to his patriotism and had his motherland in the forefront of all his activities, keeping her image always aglow in his mind.



Perennial welfare of his motherland, paramount interests of his countrymen were the object he aimed at in his prodigious activities. To raise his country in the estimation of the civilized world, and particularly in the intellectual world abroad—to enable India to contribute to the forward march of Truth and knowledge, to make for the salvation of the land of his birth through a rapid intellectual and cultural regeneration, were the supreme motive forces behind his thoughts and labours in the public life of the country. As a high Official of the Government, he was, no doubt, prevented from identifying himself with, or even from, taking an active and leading part in, the great freedom movement in the political sphere; nor was he a President or a prominent figure in the National Congress; and in our present circumstances, politics may and do loom large in, and claim, most of our activities and our thoughts; but the sphere of politics—of political agitation and works—does not, can not exhaust the field of patriotism; Asutosh, whose life was verily the eternal principle of patriotism acted upon continuously, was the living refutation of this popular belief and false notion. We have already seen, he was not actively or exclusively associated with any great political party or organization; he had also to shun the political arena on the floor of the legislature, in the press or on the platform which, are in this country, ordinarily but not only, channels of patriotism to



the people in general; so his patriotism was different from that of most of his compatriots; it was almost of a different character and wore a different complexion; it had its instrument in his 'alma mater' and the medium he choose to work through was popular, liberal, high and higher education and culture in the broadest sense of the terms. As he laboured for his University and fought for all it stands for, he worked for his country; in serving his 'alma mater' and in promoting its best and greatest interests, he surely served his motherland; so his life-long championing of the cause of education of his fellow-creatures was certainly championing the highest cause of his his country; hence his unique service and sacrifice in the domain of educational reform and educational advancement not only sprang from, but were the measure and depth of his, abiding patriotism.

We have, however, to deal with his patriotism in both its negative and positive aspects; patriotism, truly speaking, is positive; but in the present deplorable circumstances of our country, the negative aspect has acquired an undue importance. Asutosh was a Bengali of Bengalis; to the innermost depth of his soul he loved his Bengal, its people and their religion, their literature as well as their manners and customs; but above all, he was a patriot; a patriotic son of India—India, which is the home of multifarious races and communities and the confluence of various cultures



and civilizations—Asutosh was always free, equally free from a narrow provincialism, a morbid communalism or a suicidal sectarianism. Just as no false ideal, however attractive could captivate him, so no petty bigotry, provincial, communal or social, which masquerades in the guise of a false patriotism, could sway him. He was an Indian to the core of his being, an Indian of enlightened and broad-minded patriotism; Indian greatness and glory, in the far off horizon of distant past, in the present or in the future, anything remarkable, anything grand and beautiful or sublime or otherwise striking and praise-worthy, anything achieved in any part of the land, by any children of the soil, had an irresistible appeal to him and touched the deepest and tenderest chords of his heart. India, to him, was not simply a geographical expression, a conglomeration of Presidencies and provinces, the abode of numerous peoples divided into water-tight compartments; but India, as he said, had a definite place in the comity of nations, had a distinct mission in the economy of the world—India was the common mother-land of all his countrymen, irrespective of caste, creed or colour. And he threw upon the doors of his 'alma mater' equally to one and all—to all the races and classes of whom India, is the land of birth.

Not only this, all the provinces, almost all the races and cultures of India were equally represented on the staff of the University and talented



and erudite Indians from Madras and Punjab, from Bombay and Benares, were enthusiastically welcomed and many of them installed in the principal Chairs; so that the University, thanks to his enlightened and large-hearted patriotism, was verily the epitome of India itself, representing as it does the diverse intellects and scholarships of the whole country; and Hindus and Mohammedans, Christians, Jains and Buddhists, Bengalis and Punjabis, Gujratoes and Madrasees, Burmises, and the so-called higher and lower classes, all worshipped in the same temple and rubbed shoulders in the sacred precincts of his University and all these proclaimed his exalted and enlightened patriotism.

As we have already said, Asutosh's patriotism, specially in its positive aspect, stands on a pedestal all his own. As one of the highest and most respected officials, or as a public man or as a private individual, his patriotic soul always felt, and felt keenly, the distress and difficulties, the inequalities and injustices, that his countrymen had often to labour under; for thirty-five years he served his alma mater with unceasing toil and untiring energy and thus furthered the cause of his country in the domain of higher education and researches, with unparalleled zeal and devotion. To quote his own eloquent words in his memorable Convocation Address of 1914, "For years now, every hour, every minute, I could spare from other unavoidable duties, has been devoted by me to my



University work. Plans and schemes to heighten the efficiency of the University have been the subjects of my day dreams.....they have haunted me in the hours of my nightly rest. To the University concerns I have sacrificed all chances of studies and researches, possibly, to some extent, the interests of my family and friends, and certainly, I regret to say, a good part of my health and vitality"...And what really is the University, constituting as it does the main and unfailing spring of a liberal and higher education and culture, the highest centre of intellectual activity and the workshop of knowledge, and learning? What is our University but the 'handmaid', the 'offspring of the parental divinity', our common mother-land; not only this, the 'spirit of our Motherland' is to him, the protecting divinity of our alma mater.

He served his country as he served his University; but he did some thing greater, infinitely greater; he sacrificed on the altar of his country as he placed at the disposal, and dedicated to the life-long service, of his University, the best of his indefatigable energies and resourcefulness, most of his massive intellectual powers and his moral stamina which would have certainly handed down his name as a creative genius or an original thinker in the realm of Letters or Science. He threw, as we have just quoted from him, his chances of study and research to the winds, he sacrificed his sure future glory as a scholar, as a man of letters and science



—and he was the greatest intellectual giant after Ram Mohun Roy, in the words of Dr. Paranjpye — not to speak of his sacrifice of his sorely needed and hard-earned rest, of his strength and vitality and even the material ‘interests of his friends and his family’ all for the sake of our alma mater, for the spread of a liberal education and enlightenment, and for the promotion of scholarship and original thinking and intellectual activities among his country men, for all that his alma mater, the ‘handmaid’ of his motherland, stood for, under his guidance. In justice to the patriot, we must take into our consideration all these facts ; to properly assess the value and quality of his patriotism we should not forget the actual record and the promise of the brilliant young mathematician who was fast making his way to the front rank of world-mathematicians ; we should not forget the possibilities of the great versatile scholar and intellectual giant who could not work and shine unfettered, who did not even tread his normal path, but was buried in the midst of, and relegated to the background by, his tremendous and strenuous patriotic activities in the field of education and culture. The call of his country for service in the cause of education and enlightenment—the surge of his burning and redeeming patriotism—was too sacred, too great and too glorious for him to shirk ; and when it came, it swept, in its majestic sweep, the great mathematician, the profound student, and manysided scholar, and the



intellectual prodigy and laid bare the fierce and fearless patriot, toiling, struggling and sticking to his post often against enormous odds. And when the time came for him to choose between the 'crowded hours of a glorious life' and the lofty vocation of a scholar and of a contributor to the forward march of Knowledge and Truth; when the hour came for taking up once for all the role of the selfless and tireless patriot or of the honoured student and profound thinker, and he had to decide between assuming the exacting duties and onerous responsibilities of controlling and guiding the affairs of the greatest Indian University in its most critical period of transition, of transformation and rejuvenation, involving the thankless and monotonous drudgery of overwhelming routine work coupled with prolonged and heavy intellectual labours year in and year out and of thus advancing the cause of education and enlightenment of his helpless country, or of sticking to the path of an original thinker and a versatile scholar with all his intellectual powers and natural bent calling him hereto, Asutosh did not hesitate; he took and stuck to the prosaic and painstaking, dull and dreary course, for the sake of his 'beloved motherland'. There is a rare grandeur in this supreme sacrifice of Asutosh; it was not simply deliberate, lifelong and grim, it was no mere parting with one's patrimony or giving away one's fortune, or even one's saving and earning of a lifetime, for some noble object; it meant something



higher and nobler than that; for it meant, as we have already said before, constant drain of, and inordinate demands upon, his time and energy, his vigour and vitality, his health and comforts, and more than all these upon his massive intellectual powers and equipments, which—if left to their own natural course—would have enabled him to achieve fame and glory and to live among the great masters in the domain of Letters and Science. This sacrifice of one's great intellectual gifts on the altar of one's motherland in the sphere of education is a rare enough and majestic spectacle; for, those on whom are showered God's choicest blessings, intellectual, normal and physical, are seldom to be met with; when such a man comes in our midst—as Asutosh did,—he is naturally, often irresistibly drawn to the path which gives his natural and intellectual gifts their freest play and proper opportunity of development and fruition, and thanks to the congenial soil and natural path, he comes to fame and rises into eminence as a matter of course; by dint of his achievement and his labours in his own line, he receives the applause and the admiration of his fellowmen; or when he is too great or too difficult to understand, when his work is too high or controversial for his contemporaries, he has the supreme satisfaction of being true to his inner self, and of obeying the promptings of higher nature; often he leaves behind him the product of his genius and of his scholarship that receives its due at the hands of his posterity.



But as we have already said, Asutosh trod a different path, and chalked out a different course of action. He turned a deaf ear to the promptings of the scholar; he suppressed the innate tendencies of his, profound intellectual powers; he paid no heed to the call of the eternal student and thinker in him as well as to his natural inclinations and desire for Fame and glory in the department of human activities and thought to which he was particularly suited; instead, he took upon himself the vow of grim sacrifice and lifelong service and joined 'in a solemn pledge of eternal devotion to the spirit of our Motherland, the protecting Divinity of our Alma Mater'!

Apart from this exalted character of his patriotism, mention must be made of some very important steps or rather series of steps which he took and which show the patriot to a great advantage. These and many other acts of his may justly be referred to, to bring into prominent relief more than one trait in his lofty character, more than one sublime characteristic of his nature. When Asutosh was called to the helm of affairs at his University, Bengal was passing through a throes of one of the greatest political agitations; there was an unprecedented popular upheaval which followed at the heels of the Partition of Bengal; an admittedly reactionary, stern and vindictive policy and strong and relentless measures were taken against the many of the teachers and students as well as the educational institutions of the new fangled province



of Eastern Bengal and Assam. Numerous schools and colleges, many teachers and students had to bear the brunt of executive wrath and administrative high-handedness. But Asutosh, from his place in the University, took under his protecting wings hundreds of persecuted institutions and numerous teachers and students. Sir Bamfyle Fuller who earned considerable notoriety for his executive high-handedness met a Tatar in him; the latter was determined to, as he actually did, protect the poor institutions and men, young and old, that the former was equally bent upon crushing, by way of penalizing them for their supposed sins of non-compliance with bureaucratic 'zid'. Asutosh extended and continued the University's protection in its many ways to the unfortunate institutions; on the other hand he offered shelter, in the precincts of the University itself or its constituent institutions, to various students and teachers; it will be beyond the limited scope of the present study to go into details, to rake up old controversies, to open old sores; but the broad and outstanding fact remains – and numerous professors, teachers and students as well as various schools and colleges will bear eloquent testimony to it—that but for the bold and patriotic stand with which Asutosh met the official vagaries, many institutions and men would certainly have been swept off in the mighty onrush of bureaucratic wrath. Two other acts of supreme importance we will refer to, which are at once the crowning glory of the



educational reformer and bring into prominence the great patriot. These were the installation of the Vernaculars—including his own—and of ancient Indian History and Culture in their places of importance, on a footing of equality with other subjects of study and research in the University. The key to his unbounded love and unabated zeal for his country's literature and culture, the secret of his biding interest in the reconstruction of the ancient history of his country which formed an instructive and illuminating chapter in the story of human civilization and progress, the urge of his keen solicitation and persistent endeavours for uplifting the Indian Vernaculars and the History of Ancient India from their position of subordination, which resulted in the inauguration of the great Department of Indian Vernaculars and of the Chair of Ancient Indian History and Culture in his University, the underlying significance of his life-long preference of Indian dress and manners in the highest official functions and most exclusive and aristocratic societies are to be found in a burning, spirit of lofty patriotism pervading his whole being; all these place him in forefront of the illustrious patriots of our land and are sure to hand down his name to the succeeding generations as a sagacious, selfless and fearless worker in his country's cause.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE IDEALIST.

Asutosh, the seer, the prophet and the mystic--Thanks to the the tendency of the age and march of civilization, the idealist is pushed to the background--The atmosphere of a subject country like India is not conducive to the rise of the idealist--The need of a lofty idealism but fewer idealists today--The Ideal of a greater India, dreamt by her glorious sons, left severely alone--Asutosh compared with some of our greatest idealists--An exposition of his Ideal and of his lofty idealism in the reformation and renovation of his University, his faith in the future of Bengalee Literature--The value of his Ideal--thanks to his brilliant career and versatile personality, the great idealist did not receive his due in his lifetime but future generations will acclaim the idealist and appreciate his idealism.

A great man of action--a successful practical man of the world--as he was, Asutosh was a great idealist to the innermost depths of his being; a lofty spirit of idealism and faith pervaded his works and addresses--a high and ennobling Ideal of national greatness always loomed large, before his mind's eye and was the neverfailing source of his strength and the urge of his activities.

Sometimes he soared so high as to be in the realms of the seer and the prophet, to which none but the most gifted persons and greatest statesmen have access; sometimes he would transcend the limits of the immediate present and rise, far above his environment and far beyond the reach of his fellow creatures, to a celestial height from where he would



probe the unborn future, give eloquent expressions to some simple and supreme truth or present to his countrymen the loftiest ideal of national greatness and glory to be realized to some extent, at any rate, through the University; at times from that region on high, he would hold forth a faint, small but impressive picture of our national life and prosperity and would call upon his countrymen and their rulers to help in its realization; on some other occasion he would call our attention to the mysterious strength of the renowned centres of thought, and scholarship—such as the Universities—which makes them outlive the onslaughts of time, or open our eyes to the changing, fluctuating, short-lived nature of parties and policies, their noise and bustle notwithstanding, at the conclusion of an important address, he would often invoke, profoundly inspired, the presiding diety of our motherland, the protecting divinity of our 'Alma Meater'.

He was indeed in a prophetic vein when, (after stating that our Universities have produced many generations of graduates, acquainted with the literature of the highest type and, in touch with the progress of modern thought, he said, "Considerable numbers of our graduates have entered the learned professions and have acquitted themselves with credit. But something more is emparatively needed; India, we can not conceal the fact from ourselves, contributes hardly anything at the present moment towards the progress and extension of Knowledge.



In this respect, it does rank even with the smallest of civilized countries of the West"; he went on, "I prefer to take my stand on the conviction, deep-rooted in my mind, that India which, in olden times, was one of the chosen seats of wisdom and learning, is expected, nay, is bound, to come to the front rank again and take her due place among the nations which are justly regarded as the leaders in the evolution of Humanity in modern times." Concluding his memorable Convocation Address of 1914—we have already referred to it—he observed in a prophetic strain, "...the light which has kept beckoning us onward, on our rough and dark path was not the fitful gleam of a willo-the-wisp but the steady radiance of a pure holy flame forever burning in a glorious temple, however remote—a shrine dedicated to the worship of Truth and Ideal ...I feel that a mighty spirit has arisen a spirit that will not be quenched...the workers pass away but the solid results of their work remain and fructify."

And sometime after the world conflagration caused by the greatest war in History had died down leaving an awful debris of crowns and thrones and the embers of devastation and destruction still smouldering, the bleeding nations of the earth struggling to recover the lost strength, to remedy the thousand and one resultant evils and to reconstruct, in the light of new experience and new knowledge, the whole social fabric (which was tottering or was already turned topsy turvy) with a view



THE IDEALIST.

to attain a higher national and international life and better world relations ; while India, cut to the quick by a brutal display of naked force in an ignoble reign of terror in the Punjab, was in the vortex of a tremendous agitation and in the throes of an enlivening, uplifting upheal. Asutosh saw, ... "on all sides unmistakable signs of the pulsation of new life, of new hopes, of new aspirations, in all spheres of human activities". "In this struggle for the progress of the race," he declared "India will take an honourable position and her destiny will be brightened, only if we are able to provide in abundance, education of the highest type for the children of this generation and generations yet unborn...in the accomplishment of this noble task, the University of Calcutta...may rightly be expected to be the leader and path-finder..."

He rose at one time, to such a peculiar altitude that the seer merged in the mystic; accustomed as he was with exact Sciences, possessed as he was of legal accuracy and all the exactitude demanded by his permanent and high judicial position, his mysticism, rare enough no doubt, about the permanence of the great educational institutions and the centres of the learning and researches—like the Universities—was not so pronounced as Burke's was about the origin and growth of society ; but his striking reference to the permanence of the great and historic centres of scholarship as also to the fleeting and fluctuating character of the political



parties, political theories and policies breathes a profound mysticism and abiding prophetic wisdom; "Let it be remembered," he solemnly declared in the course of his famous address at the Convocation of his University in 1922, "that there is some subtle salt or secret that keeps the Universities alive, that makes them indifferent to fortune and time. No human institution is so permanent as University. Dynasties may come and go; political parties may rise or fall, the influences of men may change, but the Universities go on for ever as seats of truth and power, as free fountains of living waters, as undefiled altars of invincible Truth...Have not Oxford and Cambridge outlasted changes of party and policy?...Have not Benares and Navadwip survived aggressive onslaughts of foreign invasions and devastating floods of foreign culture...?" Equally eloquent and prophetic was his reference to the fierce controversy raging around the vexed question of University reform and to the determined attitude and intention of the Government and of certain legislators to reform the University out of existence; "Councils will come and go; Ministers will blossom and perish parties will develop and disappear or change their character and survive. But your University, my University will go on for ever.....unalterable is my faith as to her bright future...".

These fragmentary extracts from some of his famous utterances deserve more than a passing



notice ; for not only do they indicate the breadth of his views, the length of his vision, the range of his imagination and the loftiness of his statesmanship ; but they bring into prominent relief, the seer and the idealist. If the rank of the real statesmen and the thinkers and the students is thin everywhere—particularly in a subject country—the seer and the idealist are all the more rare ; the world, today, is too hot for them ; and man, is much too practical ; he is much too active, and busy ; the society is too full of the struggle for existence, and conflicts and clash of opposing interests ; the nations and individuals are equally anxious to steal or force, a march over, and outstrip their rivals, and are mad after the luxuries and riches, comforts and privileges that a scientific and materialistic age can minister to. Practical results, speedy, advantageous effects, present and immediate gains are all that are cared for, or coveted ; so that a merchant prince, an industrial magnate, a narrow-minded conservative politician, a shortsighted, pseudo statesman, in a word, the successful professional man—who does and can appeal to the lower side of our nature, and serve our sordid self-interests and the lesser needs of today—is more often than not, the hero of the hour, and the prize boy of this scientific and materialistic age—an age which has put an undue premium upon mediocrity and practicability.

And thanks to the march of Civilization, its increasing clashes of rival interests, its conflicts of



opposing opinions and activities, its ceaseless toil and internecine struggle, its dust and din of the inevitable controversies, all tend to push the idealist and the seer into the background, and very often weigh him down with a thousand unnatural demands which only lesser men can meet. In the thick of the fight, in the scramble for power and privilege, in the mad rush for laurels of life, in the unabated struggle and in the whirlwind of work, in the meaningless multiplications of wants and needs, in the ever-increasing misery and trouble to multitudes, the voice of the idealist is drowned, the fingering on the wall is unheaded. If such be the conditions in the flourishing countries which are in the vanguard of present day progress, the case of a country like ours may be very well imagined; the atmosphere is surcharged with the forces of degradation and demoralizations and the artificial relations of the rulers and the ruled, with the former's natural inclination to patronize, to lord it over, if not worse, and the latter's to serve and please must keep at a safe distance, the seer, the idealist and the patriot who live according to their own light, in a world apart and all their own, and do not trim their sails to suit the passing fancies or favours of the powers that be; hence it is that we have had few, very few, seers and idealists in our midst; fewer still are those countrymen of ours who are, like Asutosh, high officials of state, as well as idealist and patriots of the first water.



It is a truism—but it will bear repetition—that India, as a subject country, has to pay many penalties for the political subjection; one of these is that a race of manly idealists has yet to come and a spirit of lofty, robust idealism has yet to filter down the various social strata and permeate the social, communal and the collective life of the people in general. The many prominent men and eminent personalities that have figured in the public life of our country or have been in the limelight for some time at any rate, have seldom had the courage, and the capacity, the imagination and the intellectual powers to picture and present to their fellow creatures an ennobling, inspiring, sustaining Ideal—an Ideal worthy of our ancient country with its heavy civilization and culture—an Ideal worth living and dying for! Most, if not all of them, have had—of necessity, no doubt—to confine their attention and their activities to the four corners of the circumstances of the day, to the burning question of the hour, to the pressing problems of the present. Nature, temperament and environment have all joined to scarce lofty, robust idealism away from our life, individual, public and collective; moreover it always pays to be practical; a time-serving compromising attitude—and not a manly, lofty spirit of idealism—is the golden rule of worldly success, for the latter is often out of harmony with prevailing state of things and will not make for the realization



of immediate ends. And it is no wonder that the seer is branded as a visionary, a dreamer of future greatness and glory considered dead to the living world of realities and a soul consumed with a lofty idealism is looked upon as the impatient idealist following a fantom, going after chimera or caught in a willo the-wisp. But though it is a paradox—none-the-less is it true—the more intense be the distress and degradation, individual, or national, the greater is the need of idealism. Circumstanced as we are today, after a hundred and fifty years of British rule, with our society and our country bleeding from a hundred wounds and evils which threaten to crush once for all the national life and stand in the way of a fuller, truer and more glorious future of national greatness, the paramount need of a healthy, lofty and live Ideal, the imperative necessity of an enlivening and thriving idealism can never be over-estimated—an Ideal stimulating, sustaining, beckoning onward and onward,—an idealism abiding, uplifting and moving! In the present state of our degradation and distress, the crying needs and burning topics of the day, particular events and peculiar legislative and executive measures absorb all our attention and our energies. Even Bengal, which has always been known for her idealistic and emotional fervour, can boast of few great idealists. We have in our midst not a few apostles of worldly wisdom and exponents of worldly success, practical politicians and



armchair patriots who, between themselves, occupies quite an enormous space in the public and collective life of the country ; and the great Ideal?—the Ideal of an India, great and glorious, more great and more glorious in a sense than India of yore, an India, vigorous and strong, free and flourishing—the Ideal which has enraptured her poets and patriots.—the Ideal which has been the dream of her philosophers and has haunted her statesmen of today, “the renovated India” of Madhab Govind Ranade and Gopal Krisna Gokhale, “with a liberated manhood, with a buoyant hope, with a faith that never shirks duty and with a sense of justice that deals fairly with all, with an unclouded intellect and powers, fully cultivated and with a love that overleaps all bounds”, ‘taking her proper place among the nations of the world’—the India of Ananda Mohan Ghosh which is, ‘though not like Japan the land of the rising sun but the land where the sun is rising again’,—that glowing charming, inspiring vision of our motherland, the common mother of us all, with a distinct mission in the modern world and a honourable place in the economy of the nations—the living vision that floated before and haunted Deshabandhu in his sleeping and waking hours—the picture of India standing on the morning of her resurrection that Dr. Besant saw in an inspired moment? Some relegated it to the background; some left it severely alone or had too little courage for it; many were and



are indifferent to it, many could not reach it by the highest flights of their imagination.

To most men—and they are proud to be practical men—the ultimate goal of our country is a very restricted and narrow one, not only commensurate with their limited vision, hopes and aspirations, but also compatible with their and others' petty, little, selfish, vested interests; the demoralizing circumstances of a subject country where the promotion of petty self-interest of the individuals under foreign rule depends upon the pleasures and favours of the rulers, have brought about and aggravate, this sad state of things. But "stone walls can not a prison make", always; and in this land of ours—under foreign domination today, no doubt,—have appeared blessed souls who have risen superior to the soul-killing environment, who have soared above the sickening, deadening surroundings of the present, who have had a vision of the not too far off not too near by, promised land—a vision though it is, it carries with it the message and prophecy of its fulfilment. Among the politicians and public men, Dadabhoy Naroaji of revered memory was first in the field in recent times, to present before his countrymen an intellegible, comprehensive and lofty Ideal of national progress and prosperity—which ought to be the goal of our national work—when he enunciated and introduced the doctrine of Swaraj, for his country in the sense in which it exists in the free countries of the West. Lokamannya Tilak and



Sri Aurobinda Ghosh were also bold enough to raise the cry of freedom—freedom of thought and expression, of association and action, and the latter went so far as to base it upon his own political philosophy. Freedom, though the very idea would frighten many, though the very word would scare away others, freedom to him was the one indispensable condition of India's self-fulfilment and self-expression as a nation. And it was nothing but the self-expression, self-fulfilment and self-realization of their country which Aurobinda dreamed and works for and Deshbandhu lived and died for, that Asutosh had in view as the ultimate goal of his activities in the direction of its intellectual regeneration and educational progress he helped to bring about.

His ideal of India 'coming to the the front rank again' and taking 'her place among those nations which are justly regarded as leaders in the evolution of Humanity in modern time', was the ideal that was the source of his inspiration and urge and the secret of his faith and strength. And to be a leader and pathfinder in this evolution of modern Humanity, India must and will express, fulfil and realize her inner, higher and fuller self; she must attain a larger, fuller and greater life. This was the Ideal that fascinated Asutosh in his waking as as well as his sleeping hours—India expressing her innerself, her eternal soul in her literature and science and Arts, realizing her nobler and greater



self by rising to the full height of her powers and glories and fulfilling her God-given mission in the world as a teacher, leader and saviour of Humanity from the complexities, dangers and disasters to which modern civilization has dragged it. In all these, in this noble self-expression, in this glorious self-realization, in this accomplishment of the God-given mission by our dear mother land, our University, his University is to be her handmaid. Thus his ideal of the University, was also pitched in the highest key; it was not at all incompatible with, but conducive to the fulfilment of, the Ideal that he conceived of his country's future greatness. Hence he meant his University to be "a great storehouse of learning, a great bureau of standards, a great workshop of knowledge, a great laboratory for the training as well of men of thought as of men of action"; hence it was his ambition, "to bring the University into intimate touch with the nation;" because he was fully conscious "of the supreme part it must play in national consciousness". Just as he would not, and could not be satisfied with a halting, poor and petty goal, glorified into an Ideal, for his glorious motherland, he was not at all content with the degree-giving, knowledge-testing knowledge-rewarding functions and the accepted half-hearted Ideal or rather the absence of Ideal, of his Alma Mater; just as he conceived the highest Ideal for his country, his Ideal of his beloved University was also the loftiest.



Consistent with the high ideal that he conceived of his University, he defined its functions as the 'acquisition, conservation, refinement and distribution of knowledge' and imposed upon it 'the supreme duty, that of adding to the sumtotal of human knowledge'; it was as a practical idealist of the first water that he tried and succeeded in embodying "within its walls the learning of the world in living exponents of scholarship, who 'shall maintain in Letters, Science and Arts the standard of truth and beauty and the canons of criticism and taste'". And not only, in connection with his works and activities in his own 'Alma Mater' the great idealist was seen and shone, but in the remarkable addresses that he was invited to deliver at various Universities all over the land, the idealist came into prominent relief. Particularly, in his striking and impressive Presidential Address at the Bengalee Literary Conference, (at Bankipur) the ideal that he presented of the glorious future of his great and flourishing mother-tongue winning an honourable place among the world languages and literatures, was really worthy of the great idealist that he was to the innermost depths of his being. The highest value of the Ideal that he followed, the greatest merit of the idealist was this : this ideal is not impossible of realization in the near future, its beauty and loftiness, notwithstanding ; it is not, as is feared by a good many people, too high for all practical purposes ; it is not surely, an utopia, the product of a



heated brain or of an excited or unbridled fancy ; nor is it a vague, faint, shadowy ideal to be or not to be realized in some dim and distant futurity. No doubt this ideal loomed large in the political philosophy and activities of the advanced school of public men and patriots, branded as extremists ; but this does not, can not, take away from its intrinsic merit. That Asutosh's was not a false ideal, or one too high and too ambitious—that a glorious future awaits India has been admitted by many thinkers and statesmen ; one of Asutosh's predecessors, Mr. Reynolds, a greater idealist, than most of us, said in the course of his Convocation speech so far back as 1884, —

“The life of Keshav Chandra Sen is a pledge and an assurance that Providence has yet a great destiny in store for this land. The age and the country which have produced such a man may well look forward with hopeful anticipation to the next scene of the drama in which he played so distinguished a part.” “There is,” wrote Dr. Coomar Swamy years back—and we need not refer to what have been said by many eminent men more recently — “already abundant evidence of that permeation of Western thought by Indian Philosophy which Schopenhauer so clearly foresaw. The East has revealed a new world to the West.....already there are groups of Western thinkers whose purposes and principles are more truly Indian than are those of average English-educated Indians of today.”



Like the great thinkers and philosophers, the great statesmen and idealists do not receive their due at the hands of their contemporaries ; more often than not, they are misunderstood ; and their worth, their works, their powers, under-estimated in their lifetime. The reasons are not far to seek ; the great statesmen and the great idealists, to be true to themselves, can not, do not, in very many cases, confine their attentions and activities to the living present ; their ideas and actions, their ideals and aims are influenced and moulded by their considerations of the needs and necessities of unborn future ; they have not only to look to the interests of their contemporaries ; they have also to champion, at times, the cause of the coming generations ; ordinary people have not the larger vision to see what the larger interests of the whole nation demand ; they can seldom see that their immediate interests are very often bound up with those of their neighbours and fellow-creatures all over the land — not less, with those of the future generations as well. A true statesman and a great idealist as he was, Asutosh could not minister to the needs and advance the interests of select groups or class of his contemporaries with his undivided attention and energies ; hence he had to pay the penalty of his greatness in this respect which eluded public gaze and escaped public recognition. His superior intellectual powers and force of character, his diverse interests and his manysided



activities, his brilliant achievements, particularly, the 'crowded hours of his glorious life' fascinated public opinion and commanded public admiration too much—and went so far as to dazzle his contemporaries; and the idealist was totally forgotten; he was too readily, too exclusively, too thoroughly identified with a particular course of action, with some scheme or policy, to let the idealist come into prominence. He was always criticised and condemned or appreciated and adored for one or other of his numerous public acts and addresses. And in the clash of opinions and interests, in the conflicts of ideas and principles, in the dust and din of controversies, no less in the admiration or criticisms of his activities and speeches that were freely showered upon him, it was often forgotten that here was a man—a superman; in truth—who, though he had united in his own personality, the most energetic worker, the most strenuous fighter and the most successful and brilliant individual of his generation, had, nevertheless, conceived a great Ideal, and had struggled, toiled and literally burnt his candles at both ends, in furtherance of the Ideal. Thanks to his life long labours, his fame and glory it is generally forgotten that the steady light that beckoned him onward to fulfil the mission of his brief sojourn in our midst, was nothing but the heavenly lustre of his great Ideal, that the secret of the strength and of the courage that sustained him in his darkest hours of worries and



anxieties, distress and difficulties and in the dreary days of trials and tribulations was the characteristic quality of his robust idealism ; that the Ideal that he championed through life and bequeathed to his posterity was also the source of his lifelong urge and inspiration. But this part of his mental constitution, this aspect of his character, eluded popular gaze and missed public applause but were nonetheless the redeeming feature of his personality. When the next generations will spring up, and the embers of the various controversies, the noise of the virulent criticism that gathered round him, and the glare of his activities as well as the brilliance of his career, will equally die down, they will have a clearer perspective and a truer view of the man. Then the great Idealist he was throughout his life, the lofty Ideal that he presented to his countrymen and the glorious dream of a golden future that he dreamt of his dear motherland—a dream it was, in the circumstances of the day, but it carried with it the secret of its fulfilment— all these will shine forth and shed an imperishable lustre upon the departed great.



CHAPTER XVII.

The Representative Man.

The great men like Asutosh constitute a class by themselves.—The secret of their advent and popular misconception—Emerson throws a flood of light on it—‘The river of thoughts and events’ and the ‘ideas and necessities that forced’ Asutosh onward—The great Renaissance movement in India and in the East—Ram Mohun Roy, the maker of modern India, his lifework—The impact of the West and its effects upon India—The great awakening, the clash of ideals, old and new and progress of new ideas—The rage of westernization and the need for a ‘Return Movement’—Asutosh, at once a foremost product and champion of this revivalism—Keshav Chandra Sen’s fame in Europe and Vivekananda’s achievements in America and their salutary effect upon the great Movement in India—Its religious, literary, cultural and social aspects—Ishwar Chandra also paved the way for Asutosh’s advent and work—The Bengalee literary genius and its singular output,—The political turmoil, the tense atmosphere and the virulent agitation (in the eighties)—Three pre-eminent Indians and their labours—Real nation-wide progress yet to come—Its first requisite—The educational advancement, educational reformer and worker—Asutosh’s advent, another necessity—His simple, strenuous, patriotic life, an antidote to growing donatsonalitsation and lethargy.

The greatness of some of the exceptionally great men, of some of the extraordinarily gifted personalities often presents a perplexing problem and an unusual phenomenon—easy to be impressed with but difficult to understand and explain; the tendency to explain this greatness, this rarity, by referring to, and emphasising, the immediate environment and



heredity is common enough; it is now a truism to say that environment and heredity are the greatest factors in life; but the difference is often improperly appreciated—the supreme, fundamental and abiding difference between a great, representative man of Asutosh's calibre and an ordinary common individual. These great men constitute a class, a kingdom by themselves where the ordinary laws of heredity, of inverted heredity seem to lose much of the ordinary force of their application. The broader, deeper and more outstanding, and not merely superficial, features of circumstances—the subtle, silent and salient time forces and time spirit with their impact and influences extending over several generations—and not the immediate environment only—are the determining factors in life. But there is a limit to their influence in case of the great like Asutosh; in the conflict and contact between the intrinsic worth, inborn greatness and the mysterious gifts of the men of this class—which always tend to assert influence, mould and sway men and things—and the accumulated forces and mighty onrush of the circumstances, the pendulum of victory and predominance of either over the other, swings to and fro, in such a way that each is partly and for a time, conquered, moulded and transformed by the other; this mutual interaction and interdependence of circumstances and human greatness are illustrated by, and in the lives of, various great men and heroes throughout history, ancient and modern; and the life



of Asutosh provided ample ground for the play and clash of environment or circumstances and human personality; hence he was not only and solely a creature of circumstances but also the master of his situation, and like other great men, a maker and shaper of his destiny and the destiny of his mother land.

Of the circumstances of Asutosh's life, much need not be said here; suffice it to say that few children in the contemporary Bengal could boast of better, and more affectionate, parents; few were better brought up, more minutely cared for, more vigilantly watched, more ably tutored, more intelligently trained and diligently educated; few had the good fortune to sit at the foot of, or come in contact with, more distinguished and brilliant men. But to state the circumstances of his boyhood, to indicate the course of his education and the trends and tendencies of thought and activities, or to dwell on the early manifestations of his genius is but to understate the truth; when all these are said, the secret of the advent of the great man remains untold; the mystery of his life-drama—at once remarkable in the many ramifications and range of its action and rich in its idealism and achievements, remains intact; what was the source of his extraordinary powers? What was the fountain head of his inspiration and idealism, of his lofty ideas and ambitions; of his singular strength and energy? Where was the main spring of his genius, his striking and varied



intellectual gifts and force of character, of his unabating thirst for knowledge and action? and above all, what was it that shaped the course of his life, lent character and complexion to his life-work, moulded his aspirations and his thoughts and directed his activities and energies into the channels in which they actually flew! What were the forces that made his life-history what it really was?

No emphasis on heredity or parentage, early education or immediate environment, will give us the key to the solution of these absorbing questions and unravel the mystery of the advent and work of the men whom Emerson would salute as Representative men. They come in our midst suddenly to all appearance, how and whence, it almost passes our comprehension to ascertain exactly. They seem to be beyond the pale of operations of the ordinary laws of Nature and society; they rise like a meteor and their rise appear to be an enigma, a contradiction to common experience; nevertheless, like meteor too, they obey the laws that govern their advent and their works on earth, they do not spring from mere nothing; they come invariably at an hour and in a place when the ground for their advent has been prepared, where the time for their work is ripe. But there is a good deal of popular misconception and loose thinking about the rise of great men in our midst. How far the people in general fail to account for the advent of an



Asutosh may be judged by a concluding passage in Mr. Atul Chandra Ghattak's excellent little book on Ashutosh's student life ; the author wonders how such a personality, so great a man of work—a fearless, forceful, ever-active character of uncommon intellectual powers—could be born amidst a people full of despondency, inertia and inactivity is an incomprehensible mystery. But that eminent, philosophic thinker, Dr. Brojendra Nath Seal said, in the course of a recent address on Raja Ram Mohan Roy, that there is a distinct law governing the advent of earlier great men—heroes of early history * Emerson is, however, much more eloquent and illuminating on this difficult point and throws a flood of light on the mystery of the rise of the great men. "There is no choice to genius" says he, "a great man does not wake up one fine morning and say, 'I am full of life, I shall ransack botany and find a new food for man, today I shall square the circle ; I have a new architecture in my mind ; I foresee a new mechanic power' ; no, he finds himself in the river of thoughts and events, forced on words by the ideas and necessities of his contemporaries ... every master

* Prof. Radhakrishnan, also said, "...Any human being is not an abstract entity, a mere mind or mechanism, but a product of history, with its roots in a long racial, social and ancestral past. History makes him what he is and determines his way of approach. The point at which the world presses on him varies with his geographical position and historical environment..." Address to the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy, Harvard University. 1st Sept. 1926.



has found his materials collected and his power lay in his sympathy with his people. nations, poets, artisans, women have all worked for him and he enters, into their labours ; choose any other thing out of the line of tendency, out of national feeling and history, and he would have all to do for himself ; his powers would be expended in the first preparations”.

In order to properly understand and account for the sudden advent, amidst an inveterate, ease-loving, emotional and inactive people, of a hero of action, of independence and patriotism, of a man whose life was, verily, the Ideal continuously realised, of some principles strikingly held to, of a faith incessantly acted upon, and of a mission steadily and strenuously worked out, we must ascertain ‘the river of thoughts and events’ in which Asutosh must have found himself floating, we must comprehend the ‘ideas and necessities that forced him onword.’ And we have to go not a little out of our way to find out the source and course of the great ‘river,’ and the root of the ‘ideas and necessities.’ The ultimate source of this great ‘river’ and the root of these ‘ideas and necessities are to be found in the silent, bloodless revolutions that has been shaking and slowly but surely, transforming, the Indian society and civilization, as also those of the ancient peoples of the East. Not only India—and Bengal which, as it has happened, has been chosen by Providence to be the birth-place of the great movement and ordained to be in



the vanguard in the forward march of India in her new career of reform and renovation and readjustment, not only India, but also the whole of the old eastern firmament has been caught in the divine fire and has been sharing in the illumination of the subtle, profound and uplifting upheaval that has long began to transform the eastern countries ; with the breath of a new life born within herself, how and when, no one can tell, the East has been reviving her ancient spirit and regaining her soul lost in the slumber of centuries ; and India—the favoured child of the East, beloved by the very gods—has not been too slow to catch the spirit of the new age and begin a new epoch in her history,

All the great leaders, spiritual and religious, the intellectual giants and, the reformers, social and educational, the poets and the patriots, the authors and the orators, in a word all the pre-eminent persons as well as all the various movements of reform and revival that resulted in the rise and development of arts and literatures, as also social, educational and religious, institutions and in the abolitions of many evil customs and practices, are all products of the great movement that has come to India more than a century ago. The immediate and outer occasion of this movement has been supplied by the almost sudden and violent contact of India with a powerful, arrogant, dominant, materialistic civilization of the west ; and this, at a time when she was wellnigh lost in her century-old slumber, lulled into a sense of false



security and ignoble vanity, torn asunder by superstitions and mal-practices, orthodoxy and bigotry, sticking to the shadow of things, leaving the substance alone. But the impact of the West broke the spell of centuries and began to liberate her immortal spirit from her old enertia, false belief and abuses.

Of this movement, essentially creative, enlivening and rejuvenating in its nature, the first prophet and high priest—at once its product as well as the shaper and maker of its many ramifications, was Raja Ram Mohun Roy. Ram Mohun Roy is universally regarded as the father of modern India,—he had been more than a century in advance of his times ; almost all the trends and tendencies of our advanced thoughts and activities, all our modern ideas and ideals are traceable to, or have come through him ; he has been a most powerful medium through which light from the west has come to India. And just as, 'every ship that comes to America got its chart from Columbus', just as, 'very novel is a debtor to Homer,' so every subsequent reformer and pioneer, original thinker or worker in the realms of Indian social, political, educational reform, or in the domain of literature and criticism, is a debtor to Ram Mohun Roy ; Ram Mohun, "stands in history as the living bridge over which India marches from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future. He was the arch which spanned the gulf that yawned between ancient caste and modern humanity, between supersition



and science, between despotism and democracy, between immobile custom and a conservative progress, between a bewildering polythesim and a bold, if vague, Theism." Surely it is the greatest tribute to his life-work that all the reformers and pioneers, workers and thinkers that followed him bow to him as the mainspring of their ideas and idealism; at the first parting of ways in modern age, he really stands as the guiding star and first prophet of a new India and of a new humanity! The range and extent of his knowledge and activities, and the depth of his reforming zeal and creative powers, the searchlight of his criticism and thoughts, his all-embracing genius and his angelic vision, combined to make him the 'Universal Man' in modern Indian History; for he sought—and succeeded in some degree—to reconcile the claims of individual conscience and individual judgment with collective wisdom and authoritative verdict of the better mind of the people represented in the scriptures and in the codes; he initiated or fathered many movements of reform and rejuvenation that, in their turn, have ultimately given rise to the great freedom movement in the last quarter of the last century; he, thus, heralded the birth of the India of today and of to-morrow—a newer, greater, and more glorious India! it was his prophetic voice, which, more than any others', trumpeted forth God's Truth in modern India—the truth of the sanctity of human conscience and reason, the truth of the right to



life and an honourable life of the wretched widows and lower castes and subcastes, the truth of the inalienable and inborn right of a person or a people to rise to the full height of his or their possibilities, untrammelled by 'the pillars or the society' or the representatives of a foreign power. And in the babel of the conflicting creeds, and faiths and dogmas—each struggling to assert its mastery—in the encompassing gloom of orthodoxy, abuses and superstitions, he stood firm as an exponent of a highest philosophy and the founder of a rational faith, as a bold advocate of learning and enlightenment and reform in every department of our life.

He fought for the spread of western education and culture, for the popularisation of western criticism and science; by his heroic endeavour to purge our society, our daily life and our practised religion of the many ills and abuses eating into the vitals of life, by broadening our outlook, by crystallising our aims and ideas, by shaping our ideals, by championing our hopes and aspirations, and by assimilating all that the East and the West, all that Christianity, Islam or Hinduism could offer, Ram Mohun Roy really became the prophet of a new culture and the apostle of a new spirit and a new thinking that, in their turn, have given us a galaxy of great men—poets and patriots, authors and orators, reformers and workers—not the least illustrious of whom is our hero—Asutosh Mookerjee.



But we are not less concerned with movements than with men. The impact of the West—the British occupation of the country in particular—threw open the flood gates of European science and history, politics and criticism, with all their latest growth developments; and the result was a new quickening of the people's self-consciousness, an inward perception of their glorious past, and their vast potentialities and powers, a vague visualization of their destiny, a new outburst of reforming zeal and patriotic activities, accompanied by the emergence of a new ideal and a new standard of social and national progress and greatness—and what is equally important, a new criticism of 'what is in the light of what ought to be;' a new awakening to reality, a new spirit of creation, a new enthusiasm for social, political and religious reform and reconstruction possessed the advanced sections of the people. These great movements—when they come, they—bring in their train all sorts of healthy activities and lofty ideas, and plenty of geniuses and intellects to champion the new ideas and thoughts.

Such a movement came swept England in the Elizabethan period and there was an outburst of an unparalleled intellectual activities, an irresistible spirit of adventure and enterprise, an over-abundance of enthusiasm for new ideas and works, an absorbing taste for arts and letters and quite a host of actors and authors, poets and dramatists, soldiers and sailors, statesman and politicians, all of whom shed



a lasting lustre upon this period of English History and laid the foundations of subsequent national advancement. Such a movement also came to Germany, France, Italy, Japan and Russia; and the results, in the respective countries have been the vigorous rise and spread of the strong and rational Protestantism and the disappearance of the despotism and the tyrannies of the powerful Popes, the overthrow of the mighty and ancient Bourbons, and the enthronement of the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, the unification, emancipation and prosperity of modern Italy, the establishment of Japan as a first class world Power, and lastly, the tragic, dramatic sweeping off of the all-powerful Tzardom of Russia at the surging onrush and the violent onslaughts of Bolshevism. Such a movement has come to Egypt and China, Turkey and Persia and the whole of the East is in the melting pot. But in India, which had been, up to the days of Ram Mohan Roy, verily, the citadel of blind orthodoxy and morbid conservatism, which, moreover, is the very breeding ground of multifarious classes, creeds and castes and their perennial clashes and conflicts, the progress of the movement must necessarily be slow and subtle; and it was not given to Ram Mohun Roy to witness such a complete transformation, as was the good fortune, of Peter the Great, to see in his Russia; but with his angelic ken, he had had a vision of the promised land; his unerring finger he laid on the plague spots of the body



politic, exposing them to the onslaughts of enlightened criticism and reforming zeal, newly born ; with his prophetic imagination and his seer's eye, he indicated the directions of national progress and left the torch that he lighted, to be taken up by a successive and thriving band of workers and reformers, thinkers and writers. authors and orators who came after him, carrying his message in some particular sphere of our life and thought.

Thus it was that Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and then Brahmananda Keshav Chandra Sen stepped into his shoes into the leadership of the educated and advanced sections of the people generally, and the new society, or the sect (that he himself had founded) in particular ; both of these leaders took up the thread of his new message, in religion and practice, interpreting it in their own way, developing it in their own lights. Based as this new society was upon Western model and founded as this new creed was upon the ethical and democratic principles of the West and upon the subtle philosophy of Hindu Theism, it at once served as a bulwork against the mighty wave of westernization and provided, at the same time, ample ground for the play and stay of many western ideals and ideas. But the ascendancy and prosperity of the new class gave an additional impetus to the rapid progress of western ideas and thoughts, habits and customs, manners and modes of living—for the members of this class were by far, the more advanced, more



enlightened, more educated and most of their enlightened ideas and thoughts filtered down other strata of society*. But in the process of westernization, many were found to be outwardly more

* It must be mentioned, however, in passing, that whatever might be said and urged against the Brahma Samaj of the past or of the present, it has given through its eminent leaders, a very great stimulus to the movement of reformation and renovation—as also to that of political freedom—of the last century ; its leader in the early seventies, Keshav Ch. Sen, in the course of his European tour—and his lieutenant Protap Ch. Mazumdar in America—made the greatest impression upon the Christian world and raised their country considerably in the estimation of foreigners—which in its turn, did not fail to produce a salutary effect upon individual, social and national, self-consciousness and elevation. The fact was, Keshav Chandra, by dint of his unsurpassed oratory and his remarkable personality, took the civilized world by storm and received a world recognition as one of the greatest men of his times, and this recognition reacted upon the life of his people, upon the foreword movement in India.

As Mr. Bipin Chandra Pal rightly puts it,—"The Brahmo Samaj at that time under the inspiring leadership of Keshav Chandra Sen, stood at the zenith of its power and popularity and made, though indirectly, the greatest contribution to the movement of political freedom among us, in the seventies of the last century. Keshav Chandra leapt into universal recognition as a great moral and intellectual force by his lecture on 'Jesus Christ : Europe and Asia' in 1866. This remarkable lecture at once established his claim as one of the most powerful English orators of the day. This recognition of an educated Bengali had a very powerful reflex action upon our national self-consciousness at a time when we were used to weigh intellectual and moral excellence on the scale of European balance..."



westernized than the western people themselves ! westernization became order of the hour, the rage of the day ; the newly developed empirical philosophy, criticism and utilitarianism, the progressive science and the democratic politics, the outward glamour, and the pleasures and luxuries of the social life of Europe swayed and captured the minds of hundreds and thousands of people ; the fact was, everything with a veneer of western polish or of the western stock, acquired a new, and sometimes an irresistible, charm, and things purely Indian lost their attractions and their face value*. It was high time to cry halt, to curb down the excesses and put a brake on the popular tendencies running into extremes. The time was ripe for a return movement in the broader sense of the term, to hold back to things Indian, to build upon the bedrock of Indian culture assimilating the best in the West and the best in the East, and, lastly, to effect a reconciliation of the two opposing and conflicting civilizations and, at the same time, allow their mutual and proper play.

Asutosh may justly be said to be the finest product of this 'Return movement' of the last century —its brilliant apostle and silent and steadfast worker

* The late Sir Surendra Nath Banerjee says in its auto-biography, " Our fathers, the first fruit of English education, were violently pro British. They could see no flaw in the civilization or the culture of the West. They were charmed by its novelty and its strangeness Everything English was good — even the drinking of brandy was virtue. Everything not English was to be received with suspicion".



In his personality and character, in his private life and public career, in his speeches and in his actions, he represented and championed all the best that this return movement stood for. This movement, when it came to our country bringing in its train, this revivalism of Indian institutions, Indian ideas and ideals, it came to stay. It worked in different channels, assumed different aspects, and found different workers and pioneers. The religious side of the movement—naturally the most important and permanent in India—did not fail to exert a far-reaching influence but combated the tide of westernization, and the rage of conversion into Christianity, and even acted as a make-weight against Brahma Samaj with its enlightenment and democratic tendencies; it made a profound impression not only upon the promising and impressionable youths, but also upon all intellectuals, all the elite of the land, including the leaders of Brahma Samaj; surely it made a strong and stirring appeal to the young intelligent students and the future intellectual giants like Asutosh. And no wonder; for it had its apostle in Ramkrishna Paramhansa and a worthy and world-renowned exponent in his disciple Vivekananda who, between themselves, went far to revive and raise the faith of the multitude and masses; one, in his simple and singular personality, in his thousand and one inimitable, easy interpretations and explanations, brought the subtleties and complexities of Hinduism and the Hindu religious philosophy within the easy reach of the



commonest intellect, while the other, acquired for himself a world reputation and secured for his religion a world recognition, by his matchless oratory and his inspired eloquence, by his masterly expositions, in America and in India, of the glories, the beauties and intricacies of the Hindu religious faith and philosophy*. All these combined to give a new

* Vivekananda's American mission, his religious lectures and addresses, his challenge to the Christian world and his vigorous pleas on behalf of his religion form one of the greatest landmarks in the history of India of today; like Keshav Chandra, he also took the world by storm and it was stirred, stupified and almost dazzled by his brilliant oratory, his matchless eloquence and his unsurpassed courage and ability with which he challenged the superiority of European civilization and philosophy and defended the religion and culture of his mother land; and his words went home; his argument was unassailable, his appeal irresistible and the whole super-civilized society of America acclaimed him as the hero of the hour; in a word, the story of his American tour, forms a golden chapter of our modern history and lent a great impetus to the movement of renaissance and rejuvenation that come to stay in our country.

We will once more quote from Mr. Pal's eloquent article "... But while both Keshav and Protap (Mazumder) carried practically the message of a new and spiritualized Christianity and presented the gospel of Samaj practically in terms familiar to Christian thought and piety, Vivekananda, for the first time, delivered a new and strange challenge to Western Christianity in the name of the ancient culture and cult of the Hindus. No one had before so boldly and frankly questioned Europe's claims to superiority in thought and spiritual life as was done by this young Hindu monk... Like Keshav, in England 20 years previously, Vivekananda in America also suddenly leapt into continental fame, and almost convulsed not only American, but to some extent even the more staid and conservative



turn to, and began to control and influence, to a large extent, the conflicting currents and cross-currents of the religious thoughts and ideas of young Bengal; all these must have left their indelible impress upon the youthful mind of Asutosh; this Hindu revivalism moulded his faith and philosophy and explains his strongly orthodox bend in his character, and thanks to the spirit of the age this orthodoxy was neither itself diminished by, nor did it lessen, his sympathy with, or his assimilation of, the best of the West. But in its highest developments, this return movement stood for the healthy co-mingling, the harmonious fusion of the Indian and European cultures, for the reconciliation of the Western and Eastern ideals—which Asutosh lived and worked for and stroved to realize in his own personality and in the life of his people; and thus—following the beacon light lit by Ram Mohun Roy—he sought to involve a new type of Indian, a type of men drunk deep at the wells of Western knowledge

British and European society, by this challenge from a hitherto despised civilization. And the action of Vivekananda's mission in America was deep and strong. It at once more or less rationalized and liberalized the previous religious and social revival in our own home land bringing to that movement the inspiration of a new world outlook and the light of a new criticism which was modern in every sense of the term... Vivekananda's was thus a message of a New Youth and New Manhood to his people and it was a claim to equality, if not even to superiority, on behalf of India. And the natural result of his teachings was the creation of a new and aggressive spirit of patriotism among his people...



and science, but all the more, and none the less, lovers, workers and children of their own country, and champions of its culture and civilization—a type of which Asutosh himself was a most remarkable specimen.

We are, however, no less, concerned with this return movement, in its literary, cultural and social, aspects; the first resulted, in the foundation and development of a modern, living, thriving and assimilating vernacular language and literature, that, thanks to the Bengali literary genius, is fast making its way to the front rank of world's literature; the second kindled a spirit of idealism and enquiry, a love of knowledge and culture, that now forms the cornerstone of true Bengali character, and supplies the back ground, if not the back-bone, of the greater and larger movement—the freedom movement; and the third has brought within the range of the practical and the actual, the question of reform and remodelling of the Hindu society, not from outside like the Brahma Samaj, but from within the purely Hindu fold; and these different developments, these different ramifications of the movements, are tending to build the modern Indian humanity upon the bedrock of Indian culture and civilization with all the advancement and illumination that the West can offer and India can accept—a humanity that provides the meeting place of the East and the West, one of whom Asutosh was a glorious representative.



Of these aspects of the movement, the late Pandit Issur Chandra Vidyasagor was the foremost worker and pioneer, its bravest champion and most courageous reformer; and after Ram Mohun Roy the name of Vidyasagor, comes first, in the role of 'men, poets, artisans and women' who worked for Asutosh. The life and work of Asutosh, his character and personality, have a subtle and striking resemblance to those of Vidyasagor; one, in many respects, appears to be a fulfilment of the promise inherent in, a necessary corollary and a natural sequel to, the life and work of the other. It is not possible, as it will be a little beyond our scope, to estimate the greatness of Vidyasagor or the glory of his life and the value of his labours. Suffice it to say, however, that no one worked for his people with more self-sacrificing zeal and indefatigable energy; no one dedicated his life to the service of literature, to the reform of the society from within, to the purging of the body politic of the serious evils eating into its vitals; no one offered his great intellectual and moral powers and working capacities at the altar of his motherland, in such a way, with such a bulldog tenacity of purpose and undaunted courage of conviction, with such an unflinching devotion and benevolent compassion; and all these profoundly impressed his contemporaries, moulded and influenced the younger generations; the example of his lifelong service and sacrifice, his child-like simplicity and indomitable spirit, his love of truth, and love of his country, as also his love of its

culture, of its literature and of learning, which shines today and will shine in the days and years to come, guiding, like a star, the young and rising generations, in Bengal—did not surely fail to capture the imagination and appeal to the patriotism of young Asutosh who came in personal contact with, and was blessed by, him in his early years. It is rather a remarkable coincidence, that much of the work that Vidyasagor might have applied himself to, much of the task that he must necessarily leave to his posterity, was eagerly, enthusiastically taken up, developed and carried to its natural conclusion by Asutosh, without perhaps knowing it himself. Vidyasagor was one of the first to grasp the intimate relation between the rise of a people and the development and prosperity of their vernacular literature, between their intellectual progress and their abiding material advancement; he it was, who, with his prophetic vision, realized the great possibilities and a bright future that the Bengali race and Bengali language were destined to. While he worked all his life to rid the Bengali race of the many suicidal social customs and abuses that were grinding it to death, he had the supreme good fortune and satisfaction of actually liberating the then Bengali literature from its time-honoured bondage to Sanskrit, that was hampering its growth and development. By his courageous stand against the leaders of orthodox society who, with all their fury and bigotry, were blindly ranged against him, for his merciless expositions of the sore spots



of the social structure and of the morbid self-interests and self-sufficiency of its custodians, by his masterly justification of his standpoint and his position; by his unabating efforts for the regeneration of his people and his ceaseless enthusiasm to lessen individual distress and difficulty, no less by the transparent simplicity of his character, of his modes and manners of living and the apparent purity of his motives, by his innate and unsurpassed love of ancient Indian culture and Ideal, by his numerous translations of Sanskrit and English works, by his monumental compilations, his voluminous writings and multifarious works, equally adapted to the needs of the smallest and subtlest of intellects and to the demands of the children as also of the adults, by all these and many other means, he it was, who more than any other individual reformer, created the atmosphere of, and prepared the ground for, social, educational and cultural, reform of his fellowmen, and scattered the seeds of learning and of love of learning and literature amidst his society! and these latter, have, not only been the proud heritage of every home in Bengal, but also constituted the materials upon which Asutosh worked. It was, moreover, his lifelong championing of the cause of truth and progress in the realms of learning, literature and in the domains of popular education and social reform, it was no less, his genial personality and manly character which stood like a rock in the midst of virulent scorn and derision of his fellow brothers,



that paved the way for his work ; and when Asutosh did come, he found 'his materials collected' in the growing love of learning as, also of literature, in the ever increasing demand and all too inadequate supply of a popular, liberal and higher education—thanks to the life and works of Vidyasagar—in the struggling tendencies and mute hankerings of the advanced Bengali mind for a higher, and highest form of literary and scientific studies and researches, for a lofty synthesis of western and eastern ideals, and European and Indian culture and knowledge.

Directly after the Bengali literature was laid on a secure foundation of its own, freed from trammels of Sanskrit, and the varied treasures of western literature and history were made accessible to one and all through the medium of English, the Bengali literary genius was roused, as if from an old enertia by a magic wand, to unparalleled activities and stirrings ; and the result was an unprecedented intellectual output, which is really remarkable in the history of world's literature and which has not been excelled ever since. This sudden and singular awakening of Bengali literary genius bursting out, as by a divine command, in epic and lyric, drama and novel, romantic and realistic fiction, various thoughtful writings and criticisms, has a striking resemblance to the unique intellectual outturn of literary genius of the English in the Elizabethan period, and the contributory causes of these outburst are also of the



identical nature ; while in England,—as in Europe—the renaissance movement was blowing all over the country, flooding it with the treasures of classical learning, enriching, invigorating and ennobling national life and literature, in India, under the impact of the West, a new life was born, a new spirit was abroad, ; Bengal, in particular, welcomed with enthusiasm and alacrity, and accepted and assimilated, the Western ideas and ideals, Western science and criticism ; and Bengal, as we have seen, and as is freely acknowledged all over the country, has been the birth-place of all the great movements of reform and rejuvenation ; for she easily grasped and profited by, the western illumination, more than any other part of India ; and this fact explains, to a large extent, the unique achievements of intellectual Bengal in the realm of literature, within so short a space of time. These literary activities, in their turn, brought about a new renaissance, a revolution in the realm of ideas and thoughts and breathed a new idealism and a new inspiration. The epoch making epic of Michael Madhu Sudhan—up to now an impossibility in the Bengali literature—the soul-stirring lyric of Hemchandra and the poetry of Nobinchandra, the achievements of Dinobandhu in the field of drama, and more remarkably, of Bankim Chandra in that of romantic and realistic fiction, portraying the real inner life of the people—the writings of Vidyasagar, and of Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya and the poetical works of Issur Gupta, all joined to give rise to a new



patriotism, preached a new nationalism and made an irresistible appeal to the young and intellectual Bengal—Bengal which was already drunk deep in the European literature and history and fed and almost intoxicated with the new ideas and new conceptions of liberty and fraternity ! And the advanced spirits, the pioneers and reformers, the idealists and practical workers—and Asutosh combined the essentials of all these in his own versatile personality—on whose awakened ears fell the clarion call of appeal, of patriotic service, of fighting forward resolutely, took up the country's cause and marched forward with the badge of their country's service. While all these remarkable deeds of his countrymen in the domains of literature, of social reform and religious revivalism, captured the imagination and stirred the souls of the sensitive, young intellectuals of Bengal, of whom Asutosh was so brilliant a representative, he was not a little moved by the memorable events in the field of politics, not a little swayed by the political movement and agitation resulting directly from political turmoil and stirrings.

A few years before Asutosh was born, the Mutiny had shaken the British Rule in India to its very foundations, and though the smouldering embers of that conflagration were fast dying, or had actually died down, Asutosh's childhood saw the newborn patriotism and newly developed political consciousness of the advanced section of the people,



seeking some outlets and expressions ; and the movement for political advancement—if not for emancipation—was also struggling for definite shape and form and for clear channel in the mid seventies of the last century ; during latter part of this period, a reactionary Viceroy ruled at the head of the Government in India ; under his auspices, the new patriotism and political awakening of the people were sought to be suppressed ; at his instance, the notorious Vernacular Press Gagging Act was hurriedly placed on the Statute Book to deal a death blow to the vernacular journalism and vernacular press ; but the newly enacted Act missed its mark so far as its immediate objective—The Amrita Bazar Patrika—was concerned ; for, this paper at which this new fangled weapon was pointedly aimed, was converted within a miraculously short time, into an English daily. Lord Lytton was, however, succeeded by Lord Ripon than whom no more liberal minded Englishman and sagacious statesman, came to control the destinies of this country ; curiously enough, matters were not smoothed by his advent, his pious intention and broadminded statesmanship, notwithstanding ; no doubt, he is justly regarded as the father of local self-Government in India—for it was he who tried to truly lay the foundations of civic and municipal administration in our land. But his now famous and historic attempt to tamper with, and snatch away, the undue privilege of his countrymen in the criminal Courts gave a signal,



and served as an occasion, for a most virulent and violent agitation launched by the Britishers and swelled by their Anglo-Indian kinsmen, that embittered and strained, to the very breaking point, the relations between the ruling class and the ruled; the whole country began to be ringing with sharp reparties and angry retorts, challenges and answers; there was enough of heat and animosity; vilification and bad taste were freely indulged in; but it may be said without fear of contradiction that Britishers and their Anglo-Indian allies did not certainly add to their fair name and reputation; many other acts of omissions and commissions, added to these, swelled the volume and extent of the popular discontent and resentment against the British bureaucracy; specially the forced retirement of Mr. S. N. Bannerjea—the most formidable leader, the great orator and renowned politician and statesman in after life—(from the Indian Civil Service) lent a great force to the native rank; and he gave a great stimulus to the national movement. And in the midst of these controversies and conflicts of interests and opinions, there sprang up a galaxy of politicians and patriots, orators and speakers, specially in Bengal, who were remarkable alike in their powers of expressions in a foreign and their native tongues, and in the gifts of eloquence and intelligence. They were themselves, to a no small extent, products of the political awakening and expressions of popular self-consciousness and popular passion for liberty and



freedom, generated by the native literatures and western ideas ; they championed the cause of political advancement of their country, and with equal force, protested against, and pleaded for, the many injustices and inequities that fell to their country's lot under the British regime. Any one who has come in contact with, any Indian who has been treated to, this magnificent outburst of patriotism, to this striking flow of speeches and orations, any one who has been born when his country was really in the throes of a new birth, and brought up in an atmosphere, full of notable incidents and events in the domains of literature and culture, and surcharged with patriotic fervour and passionate enthusiasm, can not fail to be deeply impressed and profoundly influenced ; and Asutosh who was born and brought up in this creative age and in this period of transition, on whose devout head were showered profusely so many moral and intellectual qualities, must have had his innate patriotism and inborn nationalism roused, strengthened and ennobled by all that he saw, heard or read of his country's contemporary men and events. The fact was, his sensitive soul was deeply stirred and hurt at the inequities and injustices of the system of administration under which his countrymen had their normal growth stunted and their natural stature dwarfed ; his indomitable spirit which made him the 'Bengal Tiger' in latter years rebelled against the atmosphere and the unnatural law of inferiority that denied the native intellect and



ability their fair field and proper scope, and offered him who was a most energetic, versatile and brilliant scholar, only a back seat in the educational service; these did not daunt or damp his redoubtable spirit; but, on the other hand, he pitched his ambition and his ideals into the highest tune and dreamt the dream of his country's regeneration in which he should play a part, grand and glorious.

Once in his colleges days he was attracted to politics. The imprisonment of Mr. Surendra Nath Banerjea actually drew him into the political arena and he took part in the agitation that was launched in this connection, speaking at two different meetings after his release; but he was firmly convinced of the futility of barren agitation and did not any more waste the exuberance of his enthusiasm and patriotism on the political platform, but directed them into the channels towards which his deeper faith and inner light led him.

These were, generally speaking, the broad features of the circumstances, the outlines of the various movements and their ramifications, under whose vitalising, and invigorating influences was brought up Bengal's greatest man in the field of independent action and protracted, patriotic labour. Before he grew up into the man that he really was in after life, before he entered public life, the forces of reform and progress, as we have seen, were already abroad; the better mind of the people was asserting



itself in various ways; their higher tendencies and newer ideas were struggling for new outlets and channels; the genius of the race was expressing itself in the lives of its many poets and patriots, speakers and politicians, pioneers and reformers; and their immortal spirit was signaling its awakening by their bold attempt at the reformation and reconstruction of the society, by their remarkable achievements in the domain of literature, by an increasing stream of speeches and writings and by the notable activities of the first batch of English educated intellectuals, resulting in the establishments of schools and colleges, literary societies and libraries, in the starting and conducting of newspapers and periodicals, both in English and in Bengali, that courageously spread the gospel of liberty and diffused broadcast the ideas of freedom of thought and action, of progress and reform, throughout the length and breadth of the land and really became a power to reckon with.

But the activities and ideas of three eminent sons of Bengal—the three leaders of thought and culture of contemporary Bengal—stand out in broader relief and bear a close and intimate connection with the lifework of Asutosh; these illustrious sons of Bengal were no other than the late Dr. Rajendra Lall Mitra, the late Mr. Annanda Mohun Bose and the late lamented Dr. Mohendra Lall Sircar; they all anticipated the activities and ideas of Asutosh and might be said to have laid the foundation, in some way, of the



greatness of Asutosh's life and work. The first was not only one of the foremost leaders of public opinion at whose feet sat several prominent public men of latter days, but was the greatest antiquarian and the most versatile and profound scholar that India has produced since his time. With his encyclopedic knowledge and mastery of multifarious subjects, his unique services in the region of Indian antiquity, he was the forerunner of Asutosh who, with his varied and profound scholarship, strikingly advanced the cause of Anthropology, of Indian antiquity, of ancient Indian History, Culture and Civilization. While Dr. Rajendra Lall Mitra was the life and soul of the British Indian Association—the most influential public body in his days and was elected Chairman of the second Indian National Congress held at Calcutta under Dadabhoy Naoroaji, Mr. A. N. Bose, a brilliant graduate of the Calcutta University, a distinguished mathematician, one of the founders of Indian Association and sole founder of City College,—both of which became most important institutions afterwards—was installed in the Presidential Chair of the National Congress, India's non-official Parliament. It was Mr. Bose who led an unsuccessful movement set on foot to transform the Calcutta University, a mere examining body, into a regular Teaching University. As regards Dr. Mohendra Lall Sircar, an ornament of the then educated community and a remarkable product of the forces of progress and reform that were sweeping the land in the latter half of last century, we have had



occasion to refer at length to him and his services in the field of scientific studies and researches. Suffice it to say here that he was a pioneer, a steadfast reformer, a persistent, patriotic, untiring worker in the cause of his country, who devoted a lifetime and his great intellectual powers to the spread of scientific studies and to the promotion and popularization of scientific researches, by establishing and conducting the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science—an institution which has been the nursery of many scientists in Bengal. Thus all of them, Mr. A. N. Bose and Drs. Mohendra Lall Sircar and Rajendra Lall Mittra, anticipated the works of Asutosh; rather they were the pioneers who preceded him; their labours and example indirectly showed him his way, clarified his aims and object and focussed his attention on his goal; great as these eminent countrymen of ours were, each of them was 'an exhibition, in some quarter, of new possibilities' which all fructified and culminated in the advent and work of Asutosh who combined, in a great degree and was indebted to, the greatnesses of all the illustrious three. All these factors, all these tendencies and activities, joined, in their cumulative effect, to lend colour and character to the currents and under-currents of Asutosh's thoughts and aspirations, moved his heart and moulded his frame of mind and shaped his personality and his Ideal.



We have seen that a comprehensive, uplifting and enlivening movement has to come to stay in our country ; we have also seen that in consequence, the genius of the people, as if with the touch of a magician's wand, has risen from its century-old slumber pouring forth a torrent of energy and intellectual activities in various spheres of life. But the mere awakening of the people, specially of the intelligentsia, to a vague sense of their powers and potentialities, the individual achievements of their advanced spirits and the solitary visualization by the latter only, of the destiny of their country, are not sufficient, in themselves, to uplift the people in general to the necessary higher plane so as to enable them to reach their ultimate goal. But then, when the sun rises in the east, his rays first fall upon the housetops and the lofty trees and afterwards flood everything below ; such has been the case with the great movements that have swept many lands and uplifted many races ; the advanced sections, the intellectual classes are first caught in divine light ; then it goes down and permeates the lower strata of society. Hence it is that in Bengal, the sleeping genius—the dormant creative spirit of the people—in the chosen few—roused to action, launched and carried out various reforms and reconstructions, and burst forth in such a brilliant literary output, and intellectual and reforming activities—the first landmarks in the national progress and national greatness. But the nation—the national life



of the people—is, like an organism, an undivided whole, nor is it susceptible to, or capable of, division into watertight compartments into the life of the more advanced, intellectual classes, and the life of the backward, lower classes; national progress is not isolated, independent advancement of some classes or sects; national life can not shine in solitary grandeur in the select few; the real national prosperity is certainly not the stray progress of an infinitesimal portion of the population in some sphere of life. The very first and most important step in the direction of true national progress, real and abiding prosperity, of a people as a whole, is their education, taken not in a narrower but in the broader and broadest sense of the term. The people in general, irrespective of caste, creed or colour or even sex, must, in tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands, be educated—not necessarily in some colleges; they must have a working knowledge of things, and a smattering of culture; they should be enlightened as far as possible; they ought to be uplifted from the mire of ignorance and prejudice and elevated to a higher region; they ought to have their outlook broadened, their views liberalised, their character strengthened and their powers developed. But the process of imparting education and instruction to the increasing portions of population must not preclude the possibility of, but will stimulate, and call forth, people's contribution, by their ablest intellects, by their elect and select few, to the



national progress and prosperity as well as to the common stock of human knowledge, to the forward march of human thought, to the onward, journey of humanity to its predestined goal; and this latter consummation, this great contribution of the people, requires, in its turn, the very highest stage of studies and researches, an atmosphere of intellectual stimulus and intellectual advancement; an equal opportunity of knowledge and learning and investigation to be thrown open to one and all, along with a widespread diffusion of a liberal, popular education. Bengal, as we have seen, has provided ample ground for new ideas to grow and thrive in; she has been the birth-place of various movements; she has, moreover, produced numerous eminent men and quite a galaxy of intellectuals and geniuses in various spheres. But these men and these movements alone could not make for the fulfilment of her destiny, for the accomplishment of the mission that India, by the grace of God, is out to work out; for this purpose, as we have just said, the people must be educated and enlightened; a vigorous public opinion, an atmosphere of culture, a spirit of social service must be created, by a diffusion of various kinds and degrees of education, by the spread of knowledge and of sound, and original, thinking as far as possible. There is something of the inevitable in this important step, in this essential stage in the national progress. If India is destined to have a great future worthy of her glorious past, she must



have her requisite reformers in the region of education, she must have her own effective and elastic educational systems and educational institutions that will impart all grades of education to one and all and at the same time, help in the development of the highest intellects and brightest parts in the gifted youths of the country and encourage their original thinking and intellectual activities; she must have, by the efforts of the reformers or the Ministers of state, her centres of higher and highest studies and researches in various branches of letters and sciences, so that many of the best brains, the select few, and budding geniuses of the nation, might be engaged in extending the bounds of knowledge and Truth, in widening man's outlook and broadening his horizons of thoughts, in adding to the common stock of knowledge, to the common heritage of the nations and in earning their motherland a sure right to an honourable place among the nations of the world.

The throwing open of the flood gates of knowledge and scholarship together with the imparting of a liberal education to hundreds and thousands of his countrymen by building a glorious temple—and opening its portals to the ablest and best intellects of the land—wherein are carried on the highest stages of studies and researches, investigations and original thinking and intellectual works by the most advanced students and teachers—these constitute the most important part of Asutosh's life work, and sum up his chief, but



not, only title to rank among the greatest representative men of his time and his country. In an independent and progressive country where the children of the soil control its resources and its finances and guide its policies, it is a primary function of the Government of the land to diffuse education in all its stages. To dispel the darkness of ignorance and superstition by the spread of light and culture, to encourage, and afford amplest opportunities to the best brains and best intellects to be engaged in the highest form of researches and studies with a view to extend the bounds of truth and knowledge, is the proud privilege of the custodians of public funds. But such, surely, can hardly be the case with a country like India, whose policies and destinies are sought to be controlled from afar, across the seas, by an autocrat—generally without any first hand knowledge or experience—and sometimes without any understanding sympathy of her affairs and wants, a country which, moreover, has to maintain, by her heart's blood, a very costly and extravagant bureaucracy in all the pomp and grandeur, comfort and luxury that modern age can minister to ; the more so, when both the former individual and the latter body have the supreme interests of their own country, their own self-interests, their own personal ambitions to look to, when they have their own ideas and notions, their own principles and foibles to care of. No wonder, more than a century and a half of British rule found only an infinitesimal portion of the



vast population literate—and a still lesser portion, educated—only a drop in the ocean! As for the Post-Graduate studies and researches of the highest form—they were conspicuous by their absence in the Indian Universities till the beginning of this century; so it was only natural for Sir Sankaran Nair, to say, in the course of his historic Minutes of Dissent (to the Despatch of the Government of India to the Secretary of State), that ‘the governing classes opposed political and sound educational progress.’ But if our country has a future in the wise dispensation of Providence, if she is destined to have an honourable place in the economy of nations of the world, and not merely continue to be a byword of contempt, merely a hewer of wood and drawer of water—there must come in our midst, some great man who, reflecting the lofty idealism, the dormant and high constructive and organising powers of his people, would give their struggling literary and scientific tendencies, their intellectual and imaginative faculties, their growing striving and hankerings after education and culture, a proper channel along which to develop and flow to fruition. And to accomplish this, was the mission and meaning of Asutosh’s life and work.

Apart from this prominent—and perhaps principal—aspect of his life, his advent and his work in which he interpreted and championed, like Emerson’s Representative men, some of the inner and higher longings, some of the strong tendencies and necessities, many of the thoughts and aspirations of



the Bengali mind, by meeting the ever growing demands of a cheap, popular liberal education—demands of knowledge and culture of various stages—Asutosh's strenuous, struggling and eventful life may be viewed from another standpoint and has another, and no less important, aspect.

The people of Bengal, as we have already said, are an emotional people, with a backbone of idealism and a veneer of sentimentalism. But the better mind of the people, their creative spirit seemed to have been exhausted in the intellectual output and other activities of the last quarter of the last century; such also seemed to be the case with the momentum of progress in various movements of reforms and in the various attempts at reconstruction, under the impact of the West, and under the invigorating influences of the play and clashes of Western ideals and ideas. The Bengalis seemed to have been suffering from the defect of their qualities, from a reaction of their many and momentous, healthy and humane, activities.

Unlike other progressive, practical and active races of India, such as the Parsis, Marathas, the Guzraties and the Marwaris, the Bengalis seemed to have lost or have been lacking in that true initiative, that courage of conviction, that strength of character, that aptitude and capacity for sustained work and action—which are the characteristics, of strong, sturdy and successful peoples of the world but which could not have such congenial soil in the



latter day Bengali mind, with its excessive play and preponderance of emotionalism and sentimentalism; though it must be admitted, to their lasting glory, that it is the peculiar genius of the Bengalis, it is the Bengali mind, which has given birth to a spirit of lofty idealism,—if not of intense emotionalism—a spirit that has grown into a religion with young India and supplies the foundation and plinth of today's freedom movement; this spirit seemed to have slackened its hold and lessened its influence on, the Bengali character and personality, on the average Bengali mind also, so far as outward acts and habits, manners and customs were concerned; in fact, a spirit of demoralization and denationalization—which could hardly be found in any other parts of India—seemed to have set in, as a reaction of the strenuous activities and manifold achievements of the second half of the last century. In the field of solid and sustained work and steady, independent and unostentatious actions, in trade, in commerce, in industry and in other enterprises—the Bengalis were left far behind by their fellow countrymen of other provinces; even in the land of their birth they have been ousted right and left; they have become ease-loving and easy-going; love of comfort and luxury, preference of inactivity, physical and mental, to exertion and labour, filtered down all sections of the community; the role of the armchair politicians, of armchair reformer, of fashionable critics and eloquent

speakers fascinated them; they generally shunned sustained work and protracted labour, onerous responsibilities, stern duties and real sacrifices; no doubt the anti-Partition Movement gave rise to a violent agitation and a militant 'swadesism,' a whirl-wind campaign of meetings and demonstrations swept the land from one end to the other; there was an outburst of intense nationalism and patriotism, of an exuberance of patriotic activities and collective labour, of a spirit of sacrifice and readiness to suffer; but these were more a passing phase, more or less, a temporary stage in the national evolution and struggle for freedom and for a fuller life, rather than a stable condition, or a permanent state. The stern, strenuous life of a Vidyasagar, glorious in his life-long striving, in his protracted struggle and shining in his solitary grandeur, the life of a gentle, meek and simple Piyari Charan Sircar living his unostentatious life leading the Temperance Movement and carrying on a vigorous crusade against the drink evil, the saintly life of a silent Sishir Kumar, one of the fathers of Indian nationalism and journalism, bluntly refusing to bargain or barter away the liberty of the native press and the rights of his people in exchange for a big share in the governing power and influence and this—at the instance of the ruler of the land—they no longer shaped, as they ought to have done, the course of their uneventful, easy-going day-to-day life or influenced or moulded their character or personality. At such



a critical period in the history of our country, there arose in our midst—as he must, for it is the destiny of India, and Bengal, for the matter of that, to march onward and onward to the promised land, and march through good report and evil, through sunshine and storm—there came a hero of sustained work and lifelong action, a hero as a reformer, a man among men, brave and active, strong and sturdy, simple and dignified, perhaps as an antidote to the prevailing moral degradation, perhaps as a bulwork against popular denationalization—a hero who was the embodiment of national energy and will to action and freedom; one who was the very spirit of independence in thought, words and work personified; a hero who, a living example of simplicity of living and loftiness of thinking, restored the real values of his country's manners and dress, literature and culture, of plain-living and high thinking! who literally died in harness, championing the cause of his country, the cause of truth, and the cause of learning, and died, a patriot to his very marrow, a nationalist to the innermost depths of his being, and died, too with the banner of progress in hand and the badge of dignity, simplicity and life-long service on his brow



CHAPTER XVIII.

Character and Personality.

Asutosh an impressive figure, outwardly—'the most powerful public character'—the complexity of his character—His greatness unlike Lokamannya Tilak's, Deshabandhu Das's, Mahatma Gandhi's or the great Rabindra Nath's—The unique synthesis in his character, its limitations and advantages—Asutosh and Tilak—His personality, like Disraeli's—its striking qualities—The Bengal Tiger and the British Bulldog—A rare and remarkable combination in his personality ; his intellectual ascendancy, his imagination and practical sense, his all-embracing emotionalism and intense spiritualism—His ambition, his love of power and pomp—his eagerness for effect—His spirit of independence—The secret of his success and of his popularity—The misunderstanding of, and paradox in, the great men, Chittaranjan and Asutosh, an explanation of popular misunderstanding—Asutosh, compared and contrasted with some pre-eminent personalities—Striking references by different eminent scholars and leaders to different traits in his character, different men stressed different characteristics.

We have now to deal with the character and personality of the man. In appearance, Asutosh was a Bengali of Bengalis,—but not like the pale, frail, feeble type of humanity, worn out and exhausted, old before his years, whose physical frame is the very dwelling place of disease, who embodies in himself, the negation of health and happiness, joy and glory of life, a type that one is accustomed to meet in the busy streets of Calcutta. But the massive bulk



of his body, his short stature, his rounded face, his strong arms and legs, his enormous moustaches, his very prominent nose, his broad shoulders and the majestic expanse of his breast, above all his fascinating, flashing and over-powering eyes, always, alert and active, probing into the core of things, piercing into the innermost depths of one's being—can not fail to strike an observer as not a very common enough specimen of humanity, as not exactly a man in the street; his looks, his manners, his engaging attitude and his more than ordinary earnestness, his seriousness and his humours, his affectionate tone, his frankness and charitableness, and his peculiar ways of speaking, betraying a familiarity to one and all, will at once impress upon one as a very powerful but gentle personality; strong, robust, bulky to a degree, he was the very embodiment of health and happiness and in his purely Indian costume—in his short dhuti and China coat, particularly—with his tanned skin and glossy hair, and a complexion neither very dark nor fair, he was the envy of his thin and imaciated fellowmen.

But from a respectable distance, it was difficult, nay impossible to find in the bulk of his body, the hidden source of his strength, the fountain-head of his ceaseless energy, the abode of his indomitable, undaunted spirit and the mainspring of his many-sided and superhuman powers; just as the serene expanse of a calm sea has none of the furious agitated surface and the pillowing waves of the stormy



weather; so sometimes, his enormous body and his simplest native dress—and specially his reposing and reclining posture on the Bench—would beguile a stranger into a belief that here was at last a very simple and innocent man. Nor can much fault be found with him; for, as we have said more than once, his was a most complex and majestic character, a versatile but illusive personality—a personality that is sure to impress upon a shrewd observer or any one in touch with him, the magnitude and intensity of its qualities, the wealth of its powers and potentialities, but can not be fully analysed. S. Bepin Chandra Pal truly says in his 'Character-Study' of Asutosh, "Sir Asutosh Mookerjee is the most complex public character that I have seen; and it has been my privilege to see, at more or less, close quarters, most of the men who have made the religious, social or political history of India during the last half a century. This complexity is, I think, responsible for the widely divergent estimate that diverse people has formed of him. He has enthusiastic admirers; he has persistent detractors—But there is one matter in which both his admirers and detractors seem generally to agree and it is that he is by far the most powerful public character of his generation." Another respected journalist and prominent leader, S. Shyamsundar Chakravarty said, "Like Nature's greatest elements, his greatness was synthetic and loses by analysis".



Thus the very nature of his personality, the complexity of his character and the synthesis in his greatness forbid an elaborate analysis ; really, it is almost an impossible task to single out, and stress, any one particular aspect of his versatile personality or a particular trait in his complex character that will give the key to his whole being, that will enable us to lay it bare in all its native glory and grandeur, in its failings and faults. Most of the great men—most of the geniuses—win their unique position and pre-eminence to an unusual, uncommon and a most intensified development of some trait or traits, some definite quality or qualities in their character, as also to the mastery over them of some living, driving and powerful principle. Such has been the case with many of our greatest national leaders and heroes—with Lokamannya Tilak, Deshabandu Chittaranjan, with Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore. No one will deny—not even their most adverse critics—that these great representative men of our country have risen to an unsurpassed eminence, owing to an abundance of their intrinsic qualities, to the wealth of their intellectual powers and to the quality of their moral calibre. Tilak was one of the greatest scholars, historians and philosophers that his age has produced ;—he was a virile personality, an eloquent speaker and writer, a most powerful leader, and a politician of front rank ; but perhaps it will not be any the least disparagement to his greatness, if we



are to say that patriotism was the cardinal feature, the fundamental trait in his character, the one over-mastering principle of his life; the patriot predominated—and almost eclipsed—the man many times and gave a clue to his whole being.

Deshabandhu Chittarajan Das was one of the foremost lawyers of his time, a man of cultivated taste, and of uncommon luxuries and riches, a leader of leaders, a patriot of patriots, a public man of inexhaustible energy, a most commanding personality in the Council Chamber, on the Congress platform or Congress Executive, in his Mayoral Chair, in a social gathering or in an public meeting; he was, moreover, an eloquent speaker, an impressive and vigorous writer, last but not least, a poet of great excellence and originality that is sure to hand down his name to his posterity. But it will not certainly be doing him an injustice, if we are to say, that, above all, he was—in Mrs. Naidu's musical words—"the kingliest of dreamers", the greatest emotional idealist of his time; he was the most remarkable representative, a brilliant exponent, of the emotional idealism that is the peculiar heritage of Bengal and is ingrained in the very marrow of the Bengalis; this supreme idealism was the outstanding quality of his personality and it was what culminated in that emotional abandon, that unique self-sacrifice at the altar of his beloved but humbled motherland and suffering humanity--the crowning act of his life.



As a leader of men, as a patriot, as a writer and speaker, as a religious man and social reformer, as a man of profound and varied culture and attainments and as a student of human history or as a genius in self-effacement and as a moral force, Mahatmaji stands in a class by himself—shining—it seems a paradox—mostly in his solitary glory and grandeur ; but all honour to the Mahatma, the Man, the part and parcel of supreme Being, the image of God in him, rises and soars above and outshines the leader and patriot, the reformer and public man. His love of Truth, and his religious fervour, unique in the modern age, are the corner-stone of his character, and the regulating and controlling principles of his life, moulding his personality, shaping his course of action and beckoning him onwards. This manliness, this broader, greater humanity, this divinity is the secret of his pre-eminence ; it is the key to his whole being.

As regards Dr. Rabindra Nath Tagore, it is no doubt his marvellous and matchless poetry that took the world by storm and laid it at his feet ; and as a hero as man of letters, as a novelist, as a speaker and as a writer, he has been assigned an honoured place in the front rank of world-renowned and world-respected men ; he also occupies a prominent position as a social and educational reformer ; but in all that he writes and says, he stands, before the modern nations intoxicated with material progress and power,



as the very genius of ancient India personified ; his speeches and addresses, his poetry, no less than his essays, breathes Oriental mysticism and Indian spirituality ; he is a living manifestation of the spirit of his ancient country and of its hoary culture ; and this is the secret of his phenomenal success, the fundamental fact in his life and lifework.

But the personality of Asutosh admits of no such clear-cut analysis, no such easy and precise simplification ; to say that he was a man of one absorbing passion, of a single obsession, is but to understate the truth ; to hold that this passion, this obsession was action and work, to particularise it as patriotism as love for his University, as his eagerness to further the progress of education among his countrymen as well as to advance the cause of higher and highest studies and researches, is nearly to miss the mark ; for, no doubt, he was the most active and energetic man, one of the greatest patriots, and the greatest educational reformer of his generation ; but as we have already seen, behind his ceaseless action, his tireless energy manifesting itself in his diverse and multifarious activities as a Judge of the High Court, as the President of the Post-Graduate Council or the Vice-Chancellor of his University or both, as a leader of his people and as a prominent public man, there was the widely read student of human affairs and human institutions,



the profound and versatile scholar, a remarkable man of culture, of higher thoughts and ideas. High above his unrivalled capacity for sustained labour and his infinite love of work, soared his surging and majestic idealism pervading his whole policy and programme, and leaving his compatriots and contemporaries below; besides his unparalleled patriotism—and his unique nationalism which was a regulating and guiding principle of his life, shone his superb humanity in equal grandeur; his untold love of Indian culture and civilization, of Indian Philosophy and ancient Indian history, his unmeasured zeal to promote their cause did not supersede, far less cast into shade, his admiration and appreciation of the progress of Science, of Politics, of Criticism and of Modern Thought that had their rise or their birth generally in Europe. Prominent as a mathematician and jurist, foremost as a Judge and as an administrator, pre-eminent as a practical man and an idealist, great equally as a pious, orthodox Hindu, and a social reformer, a man of cosmopolitan culture, as a leader of men and of thought though, not a professed politician, Asutosh was the living reputation of seeming contradictions in human personality, and the embodiment of complexities in human nature and character.

But the question still crops up. What are the characteristic features of his personality, what, the principal traits in his character? The most



striking feature in his personality and character was the synthesis of a cluster of diverse and divergent qualities of head and heart, that is seldom to be met with in a single individual. But this very synthesis, this range and number of qualities precluded the possibility of an extreme development, an unusual intensity or preponderance of one or more qualities, which is generally the case with the great who rise into the highest eminence, and attain an acme of power and glory. True it was that Nature showered upon him her choicest blessings in singular profusion, and the massiveness and range of his intellectual powers, no less than the quality of his moral equipments and physical stamina enabled him to shine in various spheres of activities, and labour in opposite walks of life, and made him, as Dr. Paranjpye said, the greatest intellectual giant of his day; but no man, however richly endowed by Nature and favoured by circumstances he might be, no one can attain the supreme, abiding and unique pre-eminence in life, whose qualities tend to be diffusive, to be extensive as well as intensive, whose thoughts and energies are not, in the main, confined to a principal department of human activity or thought but are scattered over so many fields, whose attractions and interests embrace so many, and so many divergent, objects. Hence it is that a great jurist and an eminent lawyer that he was, Asutosh fell short of the greatest and must yield the palm to his Guru—



Sir Rash Behari Ghosh, a reputed and versatile scholar as he was, he can not be said to have surpassed Dr. Rajendra Lall Mitra; a mathematician who won an European reputation and would have, under a little more favourable circumstances, earned a foremost place in the front rank of world mathematicians, he did not actually excel his young country man of Southern India—the first Indian F. R. S.; as a speaker, as an idealist, as a public man, as a successful man, he has had to share his glory with some of the great and gifted men of his country. But there still remained untold and unexplored, some central facts about him, something grand and glorious, something magnificent, reaching, one might say, the region of the sublime; when all is said and done, what a career, what a life of work and activity, a life lived to a purpose, a life lived in the light of an ideal, conceived at the dawn of youth; what a personality, what a character—and these in a subject country, very atmosphere of which is polluted as it were—in an unprogressive society and deadening environment which seek to stunt the growth, dwarf and degrade the character of the man.

Here was an intellectual giant who was a veritable walking encyclopedia of knowledge and scholarship, equally well versed in Mathematics, Philosophy, History, English, Sanskrit and Bengalee, in Science, Politics, Criticism and the general

trends of advanced western thought, fully conversant with the ancient culture and civilization of his own country ; here was a man of whirlwind action who, in sheer capacity for, and solid record of, heavy and diverse intellectual labour, as well as dull and dreary routine work, was a marvel and mystery to all observers ; here was an idealist who soared into the highest peaks of idealism but would not leave any stone unturned to fulfil his aims and accomplish his objects ; here was a man of incessant work and ideas who held fast to the lofty principles but thoroughly mastered—and never neglected—the least and minutest details ; here was an official holding a very important and responsible position under, and serving on various Commissions and Committees at the instance of, a foreign Government, who was one of the foremost nationalists and patriots of his country throughout his life ; here was an Indian who never crossed the seas, not to speak of visiting Europe, but was perfect master of the fundamental concepts and ideals that have built the great European social and political systems and various other institutions, the notably educational, and tried to implant and adapt some of them to his own country. Above all, here, was a man who was a born leader—almost a superman—a ruler of men and leader of thought—who, as Sir Michael Sadler said in London—might have easily ruled an empire ; here at last, was an individual, who by the force



and vigour of his character, by his intellectual powers and moral calibre, by dint of the bulldog tenacity of will and supreme single-mindedness of purpose, by its dauntless courage and stubborn spirit, was sure to cut its own way to lead, to rule and predominate over men and things. His extraordinary stamina, moral, physical and intellectual, his soaring idealism, his redeeming practical wisdom, his unparalleled independence of spirit and thought and his unsurpassed powers of expression, all combined to make him a most powerful leader of men, one of the most forceful personalities of generation; his rare constructive statesmanship, his organizing faculty wedded to his unrivalled capacity to take infinite pains for the furtherance of his object, gave him an immense advantage over his compatriots, and enabled him to fulfil his mission in life; and while, others hesitated and doubted, feared or faltered no danger could daunt his calm courage, no distress could damp his enthusiasm, no difficulty could arrest his step, no disadvantage could shake his iron will; rather so far as he was concerned, the more difficult the task, the more attractive its performance, the more dangerous the path, the more enthusiastic he was in the journey.

There are not many men in our generation whom we can point to as his equals in public life of our country; perhaps we are not far from truth when we say there was but one man in the India of today with whom Asutosh should be compared as a leader

of men—as a public man fighting his way forward and struggling all his life—with Lokamanya Tilak. Both Mahatmaji and Deshabandhu have been the very greatest and foremost leaders in the heyday of their glory in the public life, but for a short period; and there were some dissentient voices, some murmuring tongues, some difference of views and opinions even in their own party; but not so in Tilak's and Asutosh's; both of them had to create their own army; both led their men in many a stormy weather and in troublous times; the latter followed them through thick and thin; through good report and evil; and they adored, worshipped—nay, they heroworshipped them; theirs was not an impulse of the moment, a fleeting fancy of the hour, a fashion of the day; nor even a whim or a passing mental phase; but the abiding, unshakable and paramount faith in their leaders,—a faith that endured through life and outlived their death.

And his personality? It was simply unique; it was the determining and outstanding factor in his life and lifework; such a personality has scarcely a parallel in the public life of Bengal leaving aside Ram Mohun Roy and Vidyasagor. Asutosh's remarkable personality may well be compared with the one that rose and shone and dominated, with the late Mr. Gladstone, the public life of England in the last century with Disraeli's. Like Asutosh, Disraeli was a much misunderstood, much maligned man; and even today his principles and policies



and his public activities are the subject matter of controversy and criticism; but amidst this difference of opinions and conflicts of views, emerges the undisputable facts that it was his personality that ruled his men and he shaped the trends of events and things in his country, with almost dictatorial powers; that his personality swayed and even dazzled Europe and moulded the world politics and world policies of the European powers at a critical stage—the personality of the man made him one of the greatest personal forces of his times; to quote Lord Bryce, “It was by this... serene surface with fathomless depth below, that he laid his spell upon the imagination of observers in Continental Europe, and received at his death, a sort of canonisation from a large section of the English people.” Such was also the case with Asutosh; he had more than enough of his share of admiration and adoration, criticism and misunderstanding. Born in a subject country, belonging to a conservative society, by dint of charming and commanding personality* he influenced, fascinated and swayed

* “My first recollection of his personality”, wrote Sir, P. J. Hartog, in the course of his ‘remiscences’, “is vivid: the massive form swathed in chaddar and dhoty, the powerful head and neck, the brilliant eyes, the ready and good humoured smile (I never saw him smile ironically), the clear and rapid speech, generally low, but rising with intensity with his feelings. He spoke to us for some thing like an hour with eloquence, with passion, with humour on the great problems before us. The speech was masterly.” “Today



all sorts and conditions of people, rich and poor, high and low, Indian and European, Viceroys and Governors, Members and Ministers, Judges and administrators, scientists and literary men, lawyers and laymen, as well as many great scholars and and savants of the West.

There were few powerful personalities and despotic characters—the autocrats at the hills or the bureaucrats in the plains, not excepted—who could resist the force and charms of his magnetic personality; most of them yielded to him; all their wrath melted and their heart softened—as in the presence of a wizard. Either at the Vakil Bar—early in his career—or on the Bench, in the Council Chamber or in the Senate House, specially on the Government Committees and Commissions his was a presence to reckon with, his personality was always a dominating factor.

He could fight—as he did on various occasions—against enormous odds and he would invariably come with flying colours; he would confront mightiest of men, he would encounter the most powerful

with appalling suddenness,” said Sir Dawson Miller, “he has passed away from us for ever, but the memory of his great personality remains so strongly impressed upon us all who have so intimately associated with him in these last months of his life that it is difficult to believe that he is no longer with us...his loss after those months of close association with him I almost feel as if I had lost a personal friend...”



opponents but would never shine as second best, not to speak of cutting a sorry figure; in his purely Indian dress, in his own familiar way, he would stand erect, speak out straight and move on with unfaltering steps, in presence of autocratic rulers, all-powerful officials and men, not at all friendly or favourable to him; overwhelming forces of opposition—popular and Governmental—of reaction and of retrogression, the wrath of officialdom, sweeping criticism and insurmountable obstacles—all these and many others were hurled on him as against a stern and stubborn rock; and he stood mighty and majestic, formidable and unmoved—like a mountainous peck; without swerving an inch from his position, without yeilding an iota of his principles, he would scatter the opposing forces into fragments and reduce his opponents into insignificance. Few men of his time, perhaps no other Indian of his generation, so much impressed or charmed, or bound, in such a manner, to himself with ties of affection, of gratitude and friendship, so many eminent men of different religions, of different communities and of different nationalities as Asutosh did; specially various eminent personalities, men of light and leading, from foreign lands were charmed by his singular personality in such a way that they went away with impressions never to be effaced from their memory; and no wonder; for “nothing so fascinates mankind as to see a man equal to every fortune, unshaken by



reverses, indifferent to personal abuse, maintaining a long combat against apparently hopeless odds with the sharpest weapon and a smiling face"—Asutosh did all these and more. In his own necessarily restricted field and humbler sphere—unlike Disraeli in the bigger and greater domain of British and European politics—Asutosh was equal to every situation and every complication, unmoved by apparent failures and virulent criticism and malice; he also had to carry on a lifelong fight against the forces of ignorance and prejudice and of reaction not only in the bureaucratic citadel but also in the market place and in the popular parlour. And like Disraeli, too, he had in abundance, his 'serene surface with fathomless depth below'; below his serene countenance, his calm composure, and his never-failing self-control, in the innermost depths of his being, dwelt his indomitable, irresistible, independent, active and creative spirit; and his whole career—his whole public life—was simply the progress of his ideas, the triumph of his principles and his personality.

He was generally called the Bengal Tiger; and certainly he had this fearful animal's quickness of decision, promptness of action, sureness of grasp, resoluteness of will and doggedness of purpose; but perhaps it was more because of the fight in him—and he was hard to fight with—and of the Tiger's delight in, and Tiger's inevitableness of vanquishing his opponent—because of the characteristic feature



of his nature that would urge him to smash all opposition and lead him to pursue his object, at all cost, to a successful issue—it was because of these, that he was called the Bengal Tiger.

Indeed, there was almost a superhuman strength in his character, an inexorable firmness in his will and a grim determination in his resolution which have few parallels in human nature; and this strength, this firmness and this determination were not by any means, passing mental phases, or impulses of the moment lashed into fury by peculiar or even extraordinary incidents; no, these traits in his character—which are also characteristic qualities of the Bengal Tiger—were the part and parcel of his mental and moral constitution. No one in Bengal—few in contemporary India—was faced with such grave crisis; few had, to grapple with such difficulties and disabilities, financial, administrative and statutory; few have braved the storm in such a manner as Asutosh did, on many occasions; the bold stand which he took against the mighty, sweeping onrush of the non-co-operation movement in the heyday of its power and glory was beyond any other man in Bengal, and in India, for the matter of that; it is of course common knowledge and is appreciated by all; but the tragic circumstances in which he carried on his grim fight with the Government and Legislature in Bengal, undaunted, single-handed, and with exhausted resources are not known to the world; few people know that his dear widowed



daughter for whose sake, he faced fury and wrath of orthodox society was actually at death's door when he penned his historic and ever memorable letter to Lord Lytton and made some of his striking speeches in defence of his University.

But Sir Michael Sadler would compare him to a British Bulldog; and "certainly he had", said Dr. Sadler in the course of a speech in London "the bulldog's fidelity to his friends, the bulldog's sensitiveness of feeling and iron tenacity of will"; Sir Michael seems to be on firmer ground; for Asutosh was the most faithful and devoted of friends; the cause of his friends and proteges, of those whom he took under his protection was sacred to him to a degree; under his fostering care and affectionate attention they—most of them were scholars and students, and researchers and teachers of all grades—would be left to their normal and peaceful vocation. as secure and safe as could they be under the sun; here we come across, another side of his nature which is hardly less striking, less remarkable and less manly; in his personality, in his manysided nature, one finds a vivid, living and magnificent illustration of the beautiful sanskrit epithet (বজ্রাদপি কঠোরম্ মুহূনি কুমুদাদপি) firm and inexorable as thunder but gentle and sweet as flower. It was, as Dr. Radha Kumud Mukherjea pointed out in the course of his appreciation in 'Calcutta Review', the easiest thing in the world



to establish a touch with him through private joys and sorrows that would appeal straight to his heart and touch its tenderest cords; it was indeed a far cry from a stern and strong antagonist giving no quarter to his powerful but misguided—and often, mischievous—adversary, to the man of infinite tenderness of heart, and of unbounded compassion and kindness of spirit; this humane side of his nature—this humanity in his personality which is a rare enough quality nowadays—is all the more remarkable because we find, in quite a large number of cases, an intellectual ascendancy or a successful intellectual growth wedded to an emotional depravity; more often than not, specially in our hapless country, is to be met with, the fact that material prosperity and worldly success deaden, or lessen, to a considerable extent, the humanity of the individuals—their humane element. Elated with success, intoxicated with power and pride, world's successful men forget themselves when they roll in wealth; they have none-the-less to pay the penalty of their worldly success and vanity by the stultification and perversity wrought in their nature; they are often subjected and fall an easy prey, to a dehumanizing process. But with Asutosh the case was different; neither the brilliance of his academic career, nor the unparalleled success that greeted his public activities and crowned his public life, nor even his unique



intellectual supremacy could blind him to the suffering humanity or make him indifferent to the ills that flesh is heir to ; his keen interest in, and sincere solicitude for, the ever increasing student population and the teachers of, and under, the University, sprang from his feeling and sympathetic heart, from the profound emotionalism of his nature ; no one identified himself more thoroughly with their cause, than he did ; for he shared their joys and their sorrows, appreciated their difficulties, felt for their miseries and contributed to their happiness ; it was out of the depths of the emotional side of his nature, that his heart went forth to and was in unison with, the nation in its prosperity and in its glory, in its distress and its agony, in its struggles and its troubles ; his rare and redeeming emotionalism failed to narrow his sympathies, restrict his interest or even confine his love and his attention, to the members of his own community ; and his heart overflowed with the milk of human kindness and charity that knew no barrier of caste, creed or colour but embraced people of all nationalities, and religions ; there are innumerable instances of his kindness and compassion outstripping the barrier of class or creed ; much of the virulent criticism of, and opposition to, the high percentages of passes at the University examinations misses the mark ; for the critics do not take into account, a principal and one might say, a basic



fact; they overlook the prime factor that it was Asutosh's compassion and pity for the widespread hardship, poverty and privations of the majority of the middle class boys in Bengal, to whom a degree or a certificate may hasten the much-needed relief, that were often responsible for the large number of successes at the University examinations.

There were two traits in his character, two very marked features in his personality, which were at once the secret of his success and made him the butt of all attacks and criticisms—ambition and love of power; it is not our present purpose to judge how far he was within the limits of reason and fairness in the abstract or how much and how often did he outstrip them; we would only add, ambition and love of power, not in the vulgar and common acceptance of the terms but in a higher sense, have well nigh been the overmastering principles guiding, controlling and regulating the lives and activities of almost all the great men of the world who have achieved success in the domain of action. The life of Napoleon affords the most brilliant example of the working of these principles in the modern age; Asutosh's was no exception to the general rule; from his very earliest years, he was under the sway of ambition—ambition to make his life sublime, ambition to attain prosperity and win success—to reach the pinnacle of prosperity and success—and lead a great and glorious life. The



atmosphere of his home, the surroundings of his boyhood, the encouragement of his father, the sight of eminent persons, the contact with well-known personalities, the training under illustrious teachers, all combined to kindle and fan the fire of ambition in his infant mind, which burned with increasing vigour in course of years; the fame and wishes of his father as well as the promptings of his prodigious mind urged him to pitch his ambition in the highest key and he aspired to the very highest; throughout his crowded life, in midst of his manysided interests and multifarious activities this marked characteristic of his, this predominant trait in his character never left him and he was never content with second best; he never did, nor could do, things by half; and this ambition, ingrained in his nature and roused to intensity from his childhood held him, sustained him and urged him onward and onward till he attained the very zenith of fame and glory and was the most virile personality, the most powerful public man in Bengal, if not in India. But thanks to the innate greatness of his nature, thanks moreover, to the extraordinary synthesis in his character as also to his mental and moral equilibrium, this ambition never swept him beyond his depths; seldom if ever, did it land him in very great danger and difficulties, as it generally does in the case of lesser individuals; his



intellectual and spiritual nature was always at his beck and call and never allowed him to give unbridled reins to it so as to rush him head-long into disaster. But it was his lofty ambition to rise to eminence and attain pre-eminence that captured his impressionable mind, kindled his infant fancy and became a supreme principle in youth, that enabled him to break one barrier after another till he was at the height of his power and prosperity.

Once he was installed in power, he would not give up the vantage ground that he had strenuously fought for and won. His love of power took the place of his ambition once he was in the acme of power and glory; it then became a powerful principle. But this love of power which was a predominant trait in his character was different from the morbid craving for power that sways the common run of men; the love of power that possessed Asutosh when he was secure in his lofty position had little of the sordid, selfish pettiness that characterise many people established in power and authority; he loved power and stuck to it, not much for power's sake; nor to advance his petty, selfish interests; but he loved power because it gave him an undoubted advantage over his fellow men—lesser men—and offered him a vantage ground from where he could serve the greater cause of his country and herald the dawn of, and labour for, that greater, better and



fuller life of his people, of which he dreamt in his prophetic mood. It is not our purpose to shut our eyes to the benefits which incidentally or directly resulted from his power and authority and fell to the lot of his immediate friends and relations; it might perhaps be said that it was but a part of the plan of the consolidation of his position which he was anxious to retain in order to fulfil his mission and work out his programme for the greater good of his fellow creatures; but his worst critics could not deny that he had his eyes fixed on, and his attention and energies directed to, the realization of his Ideal, the accomplishment of his object in life—to the working of the salvation of his country through an intellectual regeneration and educational progress. This love of power has been, all the world over, the driving force and the one compelling principle as well as the redeeming feature of almost all the active workers and successful reformers; no doubt in the lower nature, in baser mind, it tends to degenerate and degrade; but Asutosh's intrinsic greatness, his moral and spiritual elevation and the loftiness of his ultimate Ideal, were proof against any corrupting and corroding tendencies gaining better of the man. The love of power that held Asutosh fast and gave him an undoubted ascendancy and supremacy over his compatriots was thus one of the principal characteristics of all strong, active,



eminent personalities who have worked their way to abiding success and enduring fame in the world; and thus far he must plead guilty to the charge that is commonly brought against him; yes, ambition and love of power, though not in the narrower and baser construction of the terms, were among the driving forces in his life.

The stubborn, strict, almost rigid, simplicity of his dress and manners, notwithstanding, Asutosh had a little of the theatrical in him; his preference and liking for pomp and grandeur, his eagerness for effect illustrate the curious complexity in his character and are among the marked characteristics of his nature. Brave, active, ambitious, he fought his own way through, and achieved pre-eminence and power in the world; he was not a man to give up his well-earned position and hard-fought power; but in order to retain it, to consolidate his position and to use his vantage ground, he would often get himself surrounded with pomp and grandeur; he would not suffer the world to forget or ignore his high official position and his unique pre-eminence in public life; he liked and required all the glory, and all the pomp, all the spectacular and the luxurious that he could command, thanks to his exalted office and important position. No doubt it would be going too far to say that he liked luxuries and splendours for their own sake; his patriotic soul and his humane and simple nature



never hungered inordinately for, nor made them the be-all and end-all of his being; but he was a man, a successful man of the world—not a saint or a recluse like Mahatma Gandhi; Gandhi's abhorrence for luxurious saloons and beautiful cars, his dislike for sumptuous parties and brilliant receptions, his indifference of effect and disregard for display, we must not look for in Asutosh; while the one shunned lime light, and popularity, not to speak of pomp and grandeur; Asutosh would shine and show off his conspicuous figure clothed in the simplest and purest dress of his country amidst a blaze of colour and glory, in the midst of dazzling brilliance and gorgeous scenes. The splendours of the 'gorgeous East,' the magnificent Court of a foremost Prince, the pomptuous parties and receptions of a Governor or a Viceroy, though he never went out of his way to seek and seldom shunned like the Mahatmaji, he would use as a befitting background to set off his commanding personality.

Like his likeness for pomp and grandeur, his eagerness for effect was also very pronounced and persistent; with an eye for effect, which few people can rival, far less excel, Asutosh, managed most of his important movements and his parts in the momentous events he shaped and moulded; his poise would always be the perfect, and his blow, the most effective; he seldom moved or spoke carelessly, he had a singular faculty to judge the right



time, the mode and manner of his acts and addresses ; and he always aimed at a desired and desirable effect. This peculiar knack of being invariably and deadly effective brought the greatest succour to him, it prostrated his opponents and made and marked him out as the man of the moment, as the hero of the hour ; if he seemed a little theatrical, in his effectiveness, he captured the imagination and received the applause of his people thereby. His manner of receiving the relics of Buddha at the hands of Lord Ronaldshay at the Government House, bare-footed and nearly bare-bodied, his disclosure of the historic correspondence with Lord Lytton on the former's 'humiliating offer' of office, his addressing the graduates at the Convocation of 1922, his repeated and barren requests to the Government of India for financial help in connection with the Science College, which elicited the curt negative replies one after another, exposing the hollowness of their pretensions of their sympathy for scientific studies and laying them bare in their true colours—all these and many other acts and speeches of his, displayed his yearning for effect and his capacity to be deadly effective.

Another and a most striking and important characteristic of his nature was his unique independence of spirit—his love of freedom, freedom of thought and action ; as we have already seen, either as a Judge or as administrator, as a scholar or as a man of



action, he was the spirit of independence incarnate; he would strike out his line of action or thought and would stick to his path with all the tenacity of his nature; he would brook no haughty interference or dominating influence even from the highest in the land and in the face of overwhelming odds, in the midst of enormous distress and difficulty assuming gigantic proportions, he would not climb down or yield his ground, but would take his stand on the bed-rock of his principle and ideal and would 'brave the storm'. A member of a subject race, no doubt, he was; but freedom to him was the breath of his nostril; he was, above all, a free man, free to think, free to act and speak in the light of reason and Truth; he never feared, or cared an iota for the frowns or favours of men, however high and powerful; and nothing on earth could goad or force him into bargaining his freedom. This independence of spirit and love of freedom quickened and raised his sense of self-respect to a high pitch and never in his protracted public life would he barter away his self-respect or lower himself by an inch by trimming his sails to suit the passing fancy of the powers that be; even his strong love of power could not get the better of his love of freedom and self-respect and independence of spirit which urged him to refuse the offer of Vice-Chancellorship at the hands of Lord Lytton—an offer which he thought to be 'insulting'.

There were some characteristics of him which are very rare in a man of his intellectual calibre and



pre-eminent position in life—his social qualities—his invariable courtesy and accessibility, his unfailing affableness and amiability; nothing impressed men of all classes and creeds so much as this side of his nature; seldom—if ever—is to be found so brilliant and successful a man who is so much courteous and considerate, so much tolerant and social; no wonder, this aspect of his nature appealed readily to all sorts and conditions of men—however high and low, rich and poor—who came in contact with him. The Hon'ble Sir Dawson Miller (C. J. Patna) truly said, "...but perhaps of the qualities which most impressed itself upon me—was one which is not always conspicuous in a person of great intellectual power and strong character. I refer to his unfailing courtesy and kindly feeling which he has exhibited on all occasions." No one could be more easy of access to the poorest and humblest; no one could be more courteous and considerate to the lesser men and younger generation, no one could be more affable and amiable to foreigners and strangers, no one could be more social and kindly. It is this side of his nature that won him innumerable friends and admirers in men of outstanding position and fame—in the great scholars and men of light and leading and commended spontaneous admiration and adoration in life and canonization at death at the hands of his country men.



The present day ascendancy of a depraved 'aristocracy' of intellect and wealth, which places itself on a pedestal of its own and looks down upon the world from on high, stunts the emotional side of our nature; and it is a rare enough phenomenon in life to find a profound, all-embracing emotionalism in a great intellectual giant who has attained an acme of power and glory; but a man of Asutosh's imaginative insight and long vision, with his supreme, redeeming practical sense, is a rarer spectacle; for a man of imagination and vision will naturally tend to be out of touch with the living present, will lose sight of the stern and hidden realities, and will love to live in, and stress, the glories of the future, or of the past. But Asutosh was a true constructive statesman and a great builder, who had—as Rabindra Nath pithily said—'the courage to dream' for he had the ability to accomplish it. No other man in the India of today, possessed—and in a greater degree—the imagination of Asutosh and his unique practical instinct which is the cornerstone of constructive faculty. Like more than one aspect of his personality and character, this side of his nature has escaped popular gaze and popular applause. But none but a man of supreme imaginative gifts could plan and scheme so gigantic an institution, chalk out so bold and far-reaching a policy, none but a man of rarest long vision could conceive and present so grand, so majestic, an Ideal, so peculiarly suited to the culture and tradition of his country, so singularly fitting.



in with the genius and potentialities of his people, as Asutosh did ; with his imagination, he had not only to live in the dead and distant past, pass through the glories achieved, and reverses, sustained by the India in years and ages gone by ; with his vision, he had also to live in, and anticipate, the future, probe into its secret and lift its veil. But a constructive statesman and builder as he was, he had the unique practical gifts not only to scheme and work out such a huge and elastic organization but also so ably to run it, with its innumerable ramifications as to make it the most thriving and flourishing in the land. A progressive, ever expanding institution like the Calcutta University, required the highest imagination and boldest vision to plan and the rarest practical instinct and practical qualities to conduct on safe and successful lines. And it can be safely asserted that no other man in India could have attempted and carried it through ; as Lord Carmichael said in an eloquent and significant speech, on the occasion of unveiling his marble bust in the Darbhanga Library Buildings, no one combined in him so great imaginative insight and imaginative faculties with so uncommon, so singular a practical nature, a nature so full of constructive and active faculties, so full of the obsession of work, and so much abounding in the qualities necessary to carry it out.

But there was still another—and a very important—side of his personality, hidden from the public view, from the glare of the multitude—serene, tranquil,



bright as the rays of the rising sun ; it was the intense religious nature and spiritual side of the man. It, really, seems a paradox that a man who won so unique and brilliant a success in so many different walks of life, one who rose to such an eminence in the material world, who was, perhaps, the greatest man of action of his generation, was blessed with such a profoundly religious and spiritual nature ; and this, in the present age when the scientific discoveries and inventions and the march of advanced thought—with which he was fully conversant—have demolished age-old beliefs and faiths, ancient theories and dogmas. But, then, he was the representative man of his country in the truest and broadest sense of the term ; he reflected in his personality, and upheld in his daily life, the innate religious nature and spiritual leanings of his people. Just as, besides his over-crowded and over-worked public life, he lived another life—the life of the eternal follower of truth in the temple of knowledge—the life of the student, and of the scholar—he had a still inner, and to him, deeper and greater life—the life of the religious and spiritual man. Strange as it may seem,—but none-the-less was it true—his spiritual nature, his many regular religious observances and practices, instead of acting as a stumbling block in his way, helped him forward in his difficult uphill, journey on earth ; they enabled him to bear with a calm composure and resignation, the bitters of life, the inevitable evils, the sorrows and disappointments



that fell to his lot, as also to beat back the 'arrows of an outrageous fortune' which, fortunately, he had comparatively few. In brief, as we have already said, he was a pious, orthodox Brahmin, strickly observing the rites and rituals of his forefathers - and deviating from the century-old social customs and traditions when and where his conscience and his enlightenment urged him—and finding in the contemplation of his God, solace and consolation as well as occasional relief from, and increased strength and energy in, the troubles and turmoils, struggles and conflicts, distress and disappointments of life.

But the secret of his singular popularity, of his remarkable hold over the affection of his countrymen—as well as of the universal esteem that it was his lot to enjoy at the hands of numerous prominent men and various well-meaning friends of different nationalities and religions—was indeed no secret at all; the people of his country and of his community have, as Fate would have it, a sad experience of the men who rise into eminence in their midst; these latter, these fortunate few, as soon as they achieve some substantial success, as soon as they fight their way to a vantage ground or are somehow pitchforked into a position of authority or wealth, they estrange themselves from their common brethren and form a select class by themselves; they generally live their lives apart and away from their less fortunate fellow beings; they



cease to be easy of access ; in their dress, in their manners, in their modes of living and in their standards of life, they are as poles asunder from the common run of their fellow men ; hence theirs are not the spontaneous homage and unqualified popularity ; people in general find out that, though they are in their midst, they are not of them. But it was not so with Asutosh ; he liked to live the proverbial patriarchal life of an orthodox but enlightened Hindu ; he was a Bengali of Bengalis ;—an Indian of Indians in all that he spoke and felt and did. His fellow countrymen, the fellows members of his community, found in him none but one of themselves attaining an acme of power and prosperity ; they flattered themselves that Asutosh who achieved so brilliant a success in such diverse spheres of human activity, was no other than a member of their own society, of their own community and circle ; that he was almost of their own kith and kin ; and they, his countrymen, naturally enough, enthroned, in their hearts, a man who, though so great intellectually, so high morally, so prosperous materially, never considered himself too exalted and never teared himself away from his native fold. This, besides his social virtues, his courtesy and affableness, was really what might be called the secret of his popularity. And the eminent members of the ruling class as well as great scholars and men of light and leading from the



West could not help loving, liking and respecting an Indian who, in spite of his manysided pre-eminence, prosperity and glory, ardently loved his own country, his own community and his own society, who never forget his, or his country's identity, who never merged his individuality in the western customs and practices, western ways of living—who, at the same time did, not fail to appreciate or esteem the true greatness, of western civilization and culture or their contribution to the common heritage of mankind; for patriotism, learning and excellence, moral and intellectual, are great levellers and bring strange bed fellows; so patriots, learned and eminent men of western world could not but be attracted to, and respect, him.

But what was the secret of his great success in life? so far as human factor was concerned, it was really the synthesis—the harmonious development in his personality—of such rare, varied and complex intellectual gifts, moral faculties and physical powers; the extraordinary massiveness and range of his intellectual gifts enabled him to acquire an unrivalled mastery in so many different departments of knowledge and Truth, his inborn powers of eloquence and of expression, his innate sense of dignity and of proportions, his firm grasp of the guiding principles and lofty ideals, his strong grip of the actualities of the present and of the requirements of the future enabled him to shine and make



his mark in diverse spheres of human activities and thought; while his rare moral calibre, his fearless, and sometimes, reckless disregard of the dangers and difficulties of a situation, his uncommon courage of conviction, his native idealism and his robust optimism, his supreme self-confidence and self-control, his single-mindedness of purpose and stubbornness of resolution—helped him, enabled him to make his presense felt, in various walks of life; his great physical powers—his powers of endurance, his capacity for work and aptitude for various kinds and degrees of labour sustained him in his heroic endeavours, in his herculian tasks and his monumental achievements in the public life of our country; above all, his was the typical sound body—with a sound mind within—that was the prop and pillar of his hardworked and weary existence; his was an iron constitution which was a proof against storms and rains, cold and heat, and with which he braved many an inclement weather.

It is necessary, however, to clear some popular misconceptions and some widespread misunderstanding that such forceful, active, complex characters on the border land of the paradoxical, give rise to and suffer from, even when they are dead and gone; circumstanced as we are, constituted as men and things are from time immemorial, almost all great men—great not simply in the possession of negative, but in the wealth of positive, qualities—present some paradox, some contradiction.



to common experience, some enigma, real or apparent; some amount of misunderstanding seems to inhere in the very nature of greatness, specially positive, active and creative, greatness. It is indeed a strange irony of fate that the great should be misunderstood. "It is so bad, then, to be misunderstood?" asks Emerson, 'Pythagoras was misunderstood, and Socrates, and Inesus, and Luther, and Copernicus, and Galileo, and Newton and every pure and wise spirit that ever took flesh; to be great is to be misunderstood.' There are, however, certain characters who are paradoxical in themselves—such as Plato who 'has said one thing in one place and the reverse of it in another place' from whose works 'admirable texts can be quoted on both sides of every question.' There are others, again, who inherit and parteciple in, the paradoxical trends and contradictory tendencies of the age and manifest these in their life and lifework, such as the lives and works of Moore, Bacon, Raleigh, Sidney, Spencer and Shakespeare—'the great Englishmen of the Sixteenth century'—illustrate. There still arise, some personalities who, though they are not the children of a paradoxical age, are yet an enigma for a long time—such as Disraeli, Parnell and others. But the case of Asutosh—and with him, of Chittaranjan—stands on a different footing.

There is a striking parallel between the lives of these two great and illustrious sons of Bengal, a world of outward difference notwithstanding.

Both were applauded, admired worshipped and even hero-worshipped, for the transparent sincerity of their purpose, their unique patriotism, and for their lofty and all-pervading idealisms; and idealists they were of the first water; no doubt, there were a difference of degree and—it may be conceded—of kind in their idealisms; both of them conceived, according to the lights that were in them, the highest and most glorious ideals for their motherland and boldly presented them to their people exhorting the latter to follow the steady radiance of their ideals, which they strove and struggled all lives to realize in their own lives and lifeworks; but the misunderstanding, the paradox and the contradiction crop up when they descend from the celestial altitude of their ideals and busy themselves in the humdrum, ordinary things and petty practical politics and plod their weary way through the dust and din of controversy and the noise and bustle of living present; the man in the street can not easily arrive at a reasonable explanation of the apparent contradiction and of the paradox involved in, or brought into prominent relief by, many of their actions and attempts; they wonder how could a person who had such a fascinating vision of so glorious an ideal, who, more over, had bathed in the sunshine of pure idealism and lofty ideas, who, generally, used to inhabit a higher plane of thought, how could he bring himself to do the many petty acts



and things, mostly in furtherance of their ideals. Here the enigma is complete; for there is no doubt of their sincerity, no mistaking of their idealism, no belittling of their patriotism; but there remains the fact of people's failure to reconcile many of their actions with the loftiness of their idealism and the excellence their own nature. It is not difficult—far less impossible—to point to many public actions and works of Asutosh and Chittaranjan, which might not be commensurate, or on a line, with their high idealism and exalted character; hence arose a good deal of misunderstanding, misrepresentation and even calumny, from some quarters. The fact was this: both, Asutosh and Chittaranjan were two of the greatest idealists of their generation; both of them were baptised in the holiest fire of idealism and patriotism; only in the former, the urge of the ideal, the force of idealism failed to destroy the practical side in his character; while in the latter the urge of the ideal—the force of idealism—reigned supreme and swept everything aside, overpowering and overwhelming the man; but they were not simply idle, impatient, and dreamy idealists; what is greater, they were men of action, it was through their life-long activities and sustained efforts that they sought and strove to realize their lofty ideals; to their idealism, they joined an extraordinary single-mindedness of purpose, a reckless passion for work, and singular obsession for the fulfilment of their dreams, in the advancement of their country; once they conceived



and set before themselves their ideals, they were fully possessed and captured by them; once they were out on their onerous journey on the road to the realization of their ideals, there would be no going back, no giving up, no shirking of trouble or difficulty; nor even any counting of cost; completely charmed and even consumed by their ideals as they used to be, nothing could arrest their course, nothing could daunt their spirit or damp their enthusiasm; they would discard a plan or would reject a line of action, if it would prove unworkable or unsuitable; they would again think out another programme, chalk out another course of action—as if nothing had happened; and they would apply themselves, devoting all their energies and enthusiasm to the furtherance of their cause, in the light of their ideas; so long as they remained true to themselves and true to their country and to their ideals they might not stop to consider the quality of some of the means or of the steps which might may be rightly or wrongly regarded as unworthy of themselves; but they would go forward in their difficult journey on the path that is, to put it mildly, extremely perilous to all but themselves. People are afraid—they are anxious—that the lure of their heavenly ideal, the frenzy of their idealism, the apparent wrong course of their action and their mad, restless, active spirit, would hurl them head-long into disaster sooner or later; but men of this way of thinking are mistaken, as they fail to take proper measure of those



who are really giants ; they forget that these men, these princes among men, are made of sterner, purer and higher stuff ; their native strength of character, their force of personality and the innate greatness of their nature come to their rescue and stand them in good stead in the hour of trial and peril, but it is true—and it is no serious disparagement to their intrinsic excellence or to their lifework—that they are some times guilty of grave errors of judgments or of miscalculations ; some times, again, they seem to or do take morally wrong steps or adopt measures not worthy of, or up to, themselves ; in this connection the central fact, the cardinal point and the sure standard is generally lost sight of ; and judgment goes by default against them ; the most important factor, the principal fact to be taken into proper consideration when one sits in judgment upon the acts of omissions or commissions of Asutosh and Chittaranjan is this : the sin is not in the act, but in the sinner ; assuming that both of them have committed not only many indiscretions but also what was positively wrong or immoral, it goes without saying that they have done so under the peculiar exigencies of circumstances, under the irresistible urge of their necessities, with the firm conviction that by that course of action they were furthering their sacred cause—the cause of their country ; moreover human beings and human nature being what they are, some failings and some foibles, some failures and some shortcomings, no human being can avoid ; but men of



their calibre, of their obsession for patriotic work, of their passion for the realization of their ideal—men of their driving energy, of their doggedness of purpose and single-mindedness of action, men who harness themselves to incessant work and are drawn into whirlpools of multifarious actions, can not but fall into some pitfalls or errors; as they lose themselves, merging their whole being in their selfless, self-imposed and noble work, as they are always carried away and fired by their surging and all-embracing idealism and patriotism—the idealism and patriotism which are the overmastering principles of their life and never leave them in any sphere of activity, rather beckon them onward and onward like the guiding star in an encompassing and gathering gloom—the immorality, the sin or the wrong that is generally attached to the act and resides in the actor seldom touch them, far less possess them; such was the case with Asutosh and Chittaranjan. Their noble souls always soared high above, and far beyond, the limitations of the present; in the innermost depths of their being they were wedded to their ideal and bound to their country. Their gaze were always fixed on the dim and distant horizon, on the far off but not too far off promised land—invisible to all but eyes inspired like theirs.

But the comparison between these two great Bengalis goes thus far and no further; for, in the personality of Asutosh, as we have already seen, an intense idealism blended with his rare practical



wisdom; Asutosh was essentially active, predominantly intellectual and eminently successful man of the world in so far as he accomplished his life's object and ambition; pitching his idealism as he did in the highest tune, he would not aim at an utopia or ideal excellence, but would content himself with the best he could by his hand on, utilizing and working upon the materials that were handy, he would thus become the master of the situation. Chittaranjan, was, above all, an uncompromising idealist—sometimes a mystic; there was something majestic, dynamic and unbending in his nature that would break the impossible or be broken by it; he knew no halfway house; in fact, he spent his life's energy and vitality in pursuing the policy and treading the dreary path that, he considered, would ultimately—but not in the immediate future—land his country men on the promised land, and would in the long run, lead to the future realization of his glorious dreams, rather than accept the unsatisfactory state of things as the base of his activities and work the existing materials—bad as they undoubtedly were—to raise his 'beautiful mansion' of national greatness and glory.

Asutosh has been compared with many of his countrymen, pre-eminent in some sphere of life or other; a comparison is often sought to be drawn between Asutosh and Sir Asutosh Chaudhuri, and another, between him and the late Mr. Justice Telang of Bombay. There are of course some points



of resemblance between our hero and his namesake, both were ornaments of the same High Court, but Sir A. Chaudhuri rose into eminence as a brilliant counsel, as a prominent public man, as an eloquent speaker and as a political leader who might be said to have given a new turn to the prevailing political thinking and political activities, with his famous dictum—(a subject nation has no politics); but Asutosh was not simply a great Judge, he was a greater jurist, not only a powerful public man and speaker, but an eminent and highly successful administrator, not a political leader, nor even a professed politician, Asutosh had the makings and imagination of a statesman, and the creative inspiration of a great builder and he was statesman and reformer and builder all combined.

His comparison with Telang goes much deeper. Both of them belonged to the same class of jurist-Judges—alas, almost extinct—who would treat Law just a research scholar treats History today, going deep into the very bottom of things, giving masterly interpretations of, or otherwise throwing new light, upon ancient customs and usages, laws and principles; and to both of them, Law was something not only majestic but growing and continuous; both of them were associated, for long period, with their respective Universities intimately and prominently, both were masters of their own vernaculars, as also of English, Sanskrit and History; but Telang was pre-eminently a Sanskrit scholar and Translator, and Asutosh was



perhaps greater as a mathematician ; while the activities of the former spread over various fields of public life such as, social reform, politics and education, Asutosh was firstly, the foremost educationalist and only secondarily, a social reformer, and as has been said before, a builder of the Indian Nation—an architect of India's national greatness.

We must, however, bear in mind that the complexity of his character, the synthetic greatness of his personality as well as his remarkable achievements and lifework were all his own and entitle him to a distinct class of national workers and heroes, apart from the common run of public man. Not only this ; the different traits in his character, the different aspects of his personality have appealed to people in various ways and they have laid particular stress upon what they were most impressed by. Some people, if not most of them, who knew him, were struck by the range of his reading, the depth of his learning and the versatile nature of his scholarship ; some admired his unique independence of spirit, some, his patriotism ; some, again, his infinite and inexhaustible capacity for sustained and multifarious labours ; others were more impressed and astonished at his massive intellectual powers and his uncommon moral calibre ; some emphasised his representative character, some, again, dwelt on the peculiar greatness and synthesis in his personality.

It is interesting, in this connection, to note the different tributes paid by different prominent men to his greatness. His Excellency Lord Lytton said in the course of his eloquent presidential speech at the condolence meeting of the Senate, "Sir Asutosh Mookerjee was the most striking and representative Bengali of his time. The versatility of his intellect and the variety of his interests were so great that there is scarcely any department of public life of this province which has not been left the poorer by his death." "He was the greatest Bengali of his generation," said the Hon'ble Sir Lancelot Sanderson, "I do not think I should be wrong if I were to say that in many respects he was the greatest Indian of his day." "In Sir Asutosh Mookerjee... India has lost one of her greatest men and the world, one of its commanding personalities... He was mighty in battle; he could have ruled an Empire...", said Sir Michael Sadler. "We shall long mourn the departure of a man," wrote Sir P. J. Hartog, "whose vast capacity and encyclopedic learning, whose devotion to the cause of higher education, and whose ceaseless energy made him the admiration of all who knew him. In Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, India loses one of the greatest of her sons." "To my mind," said Prof. Radhakrishnan, "his claim to greatness rests not so much on the reforms he initiated and worked out—great as they were—as on his sympathy for scholars—enthusiasm for learning and the power to communicate them to all near him." But Sir



P. C. Roy's tribute laid bare the truth nicely ; thus wrote the great Bengali savant and scientist, "Fortified with all modern intellectual equipments in science, literature and law, gifted with the imagination worthy of a creator, possessing enthusiasm and endurance rarely equalled, Sir Asutosh was one of the greatest men born of any age. Apparently a complex personality, the whole passion of his life was the intellectual regeneration of his country... Had he been born in a free country, where his intellect might have found untrammelled scope, he would most certainly have followed politics, as his career, and would have ranked as a Bismark." "Like all great men," said Dr. George Howells in the course of a striking tribute, "he had his failings, but I can truly say that I revered him as an elder brother. His driving force, executive ability and extraordinary genius in grasping both principles and details, made him a king among men,... by far the greatest personality it has been my privilege to come in contact with, whether in the East or in the West."

No less striking was the tribute from the pen of Dr. Sylvain Levi, the distinguished French Orientalist, "There was in his nature a power of will, energy, and activity that impressed at first sight as in Nature's grandest works, in lofty mountains, in oceans ; but this power was not inert or destructive. No machine, however big, was too huge for his power of



construction. What he could do of the Calcutta University looks rather like a miracle ; he was too realistic to believe in the efficiency of stones and monuments, he wanted to have it built of men and he spared no pains to train a new generation of young scholars, as devoted as their forefathers, to the search of truth, but able to search on new lines,...his towering genius could survey the whole range of human sciences, and he wanted to have it explored by competent workers." But in estimating the greatness of Asutosh, in judging his work or in ascertaining his proper place on the roll of the illustrious sons of India of today, we must bear in mind the memorable, short and lucid speech of the late lamented Deshabandhu Das, delivered from the Mayoral Chair of Calcutta, in an inspired moment. "It has been said," declared the first Mayor of Calcutta, "that he (Asutosh) was a great lawyer, so indeed he was but his greatness was greater than the greatness of a mere lawyer. It had been said that he was a great Judge but here again his greatness was greater, far greater than the greatness of merely a great judge. It has been said that he was a great educationist. Undoubtedly he was. He was one of the foremost, and if you count the number of educationists all the world over, I doubt whether you can come across a greater educationist than Sir Asutosh Mookerjee. But here again I stand on my original observation—he was far greater than merely a great educationist. His heart was with the nation. He was a builder.



He tried to build the great Indian nation and honour it with his activities."

This remarkable utterance coupled with the appreciation of Drs. P. C. Roy and Sylvain Levi will give us the key to his synthetic and peculiar greatness and enable us to ascertain his place among the departed great of India, among her advanced, active and creative spirits, among the standard bearers of her freedom—among the shapers of her destiny in the modern age.



CHAPTER XIX.

His Life-Work and Message.

Asutosh was not responsible for the Act of 1904 or for the absence of ideal results and method—The overcrowding of the legal profession, its disastrous consequences—Asutosh's life-long association with Governmental institutions and, his aloofness from the Freedom Movement in the sphere of politics, unlike Deshabandu Das and Pandit Malaviya—Parasitic tendency of big organizations, the rise of the Calcutta University eclipsed the life and prevented the growth of other institutions, the country's loss on that account—His disassociation with the National Congress, but 'his heart was in unision with his time and country'—His contribution to the great forward movement in various ways—He tried to save India's eternal soul and rouse her creative spirit—He demonstrated India's capacity, to add to the common heritage of humanity, and stimulated her genius for mastery, of European Science and Thought—Asutosh, a world-personality, his visualization of the path of human progress and his contribution to the international understanding and harmony—The verdict of posterity, a maker of modern India, a hero of action, a representative man and a great builder.—Asutosh's Message.

In judging the nature and estimating the worth of his lifework, one must not fall into some popular and plausible fallacy or misunderstanding and call for the head of Asutosh on the charger for the many deplorable consequences resulting from, or associated with the system of education—of which University is at the top—with the constitution of the Government, or with the transitional period of world-wide unrest and universal economic distress. One of the popular



fallacies is that the undemocratic, obnoxious Act which Asutosh worked out and laboured under, was his own making; and the highly complimentary remark of the Hon'ble Member in charge of the Universities Bill about Asutosh's work on the select Committee in shaping it, lent colour to this popular fallacy; but Asutosh was far too great an idealist, far too great a patriot to be satisfied with such a halting, unsatisfactory Act as the present one is; but he was not simply an uncompromising idealist; he was a worker, a man of action; like the workers all the world over, he decided to accept the second best and mould and shape it and wring from it as much good as he could. As Lord Carmichael said in the course of his Convocation speech in 1914, 'he (Asutosh) has aimed at getting something done and getting that something done quickly. I have talked with Sir Asutosh about University development, and he has told me more than once that if he could set up his ideal and work for it, it might be very different from the ideal which has been set up for him and for which he has had to work...'

It would be quite out of place at the end of our study, to discuss and meet all the criticisms that have appeared in regard to Asutosh's work in the University; we have already dealt with some of these; but there are many—and their number is on the increase—who deplore the absence of ideal results, of systematic development and methodical, well-planned advance; for them, let Asutosh



himself speak. "The fact is," said he in 1913, "we are not permitted to work under ideal conditions... Let us conceive that some powerful magician were all at once to appear on the scene and address us, as follows: "I know, my friends, that it is your great wish to establish a true model, teaching residential University... Here I present you with an extensive plot of land... observe, scattered all over the place those manifold groups of palatial buildings... All these I freely place at your disposal... you have access to a gold mine from which you may draw half a million pounds a year... you will find in the treasury ten million pounds for initial expenses. Take possession of all and prosper."—Let such an offer be made, and I promise you that we shall at once set to work vigorously, and methodically build up a perfect University; but alas, such pleasant things do not happen, at least not at Calcutta. We are compelled to make the best of what we have—limited means, unfavourable surroundings, unsuitable buildings, intermittent opportunities."

There is one aspect of his lifework—though not the main but a most important one—which has been most lamentable and disheartening in its consequences; it is the invasion of the legal profession by all sorts and conditions of people, by hundreds and thousands of graduates, good, bad and indifferent. If the unemployment and under-employment of educated youths of the country is nothing but the



waste of the flower of its manhood and worse than the waste of its material resources, the pitiable overcrowding of the profession of law is far more deplorable and disastrous. The University Commission over which Dr. Sadler presided, eloquently condemned the system responsible for the wastage of the nation's intelligent and youthful manhood; but the ever increasing influx of graduates in Law, the continued distress and disappointment of the young pleaders with whom the Bar Libraries are crowded to suffocation not only add immeasurably to the growing volume of discontent and disillusionment but also lead to very far-reaching and disastrous consequences; for it is not merely a matter of personal distress and domestic troubles and worries, to the innumerable pleaders; it is far more serious and nation-wide in its results; their enforced idleness and inactivity, physical and mental, dwarf the healthy growth, sap the vitality, destroy the initiative and the buoyancy of the nation, to a large extent. Law, moreover, is a jealous mistress—it is almost a truism to say so; but Law requires not only intelligence and eloquence in a foreign tongue, not only ability and dexterity—more than ordinary ability and infinite patience—which can hardly be found in the common run of men; w, requires something more than all these, and in a greater degree. With all these and other qualities it is almost impossible to earn a decent living—not to speak of shining—at the Bar, specially in the first few years.



of one's career, unless one is pushed and supported substantially; even the greatest leaders, the veritable giants had to wait years and years together before they could make any headway, and this, before this profession was flooded with thousands of new comers; the situation is a hundred fold bad and even desperate today; and not one in a hundred is on the road to prosperity. The remedy of this national distress was not within the competence of Asutosh; nor was it within his reach; and strictly speaking. Asutosh's was not the positive responsibility for this country-wide evil; but a leader of long vision as he was, Asutosh might have ranged himself against this inrush, this invasion and influx of law graduates; surely he could have raised his voice against the disastrous tendency, against this suicidal inclination of the nation's youths; he ought to have tried to turn the tide; a statesman of imagination as he was, he was surely alive to the baneful effects of the adoption of legal career by increasing numbers of the young men; not that legal education is without its bright side; but to the vast majority of the young, aimless and indifferent lawyers it is at best a luxury and not a necessity, not a road to prosperity and happiness, individual or national. And the only exonerating circumstances that can be cited in support of Asutosh was this: he was too busy, too pre-occupied, too worried with the scheme and consolidation of Post-Graduate Studies, its developments and expansions, to exert



himself against the popular tendencies of adoption of legal vocation.

Before we proceed further in our estimate of his greatness and in ascertaining his place in the history of our country as a maker of modern Bengal, and a shaper of Indian Renaissance it is necessary to refer to a line of criticism that may be and is applied to him; this criticism is mainly directed against his lifelong association with a foreign Government, with his position as a High Court Judge in a system of foreign administration, which to put it briefly, has been characterised by Mahatma Gandhi as satanic; naturally enough his consequent and necessary aloofness from the political agitation and the Congress movement may come in for its share of criticism.

There is one aspect of this question which should not be lost sight of. Now that several years have elapsed since the leaders of the Non-co-operation Movement aimed their powerful blow at the University and Asutosh met it with his bold stand, no one questions the wisdom of his attitude, no one deprecates his part in that critical period. But without leaving the University to the tender mercies of the bureaucrats and reactionaries, political adventurers and academic impostors, retaining power and position of authority and influence, and the threads of control and management in his own hands,—Asutosh might have put himself at the head of the Freedom Movement in the political sphere,



might have placed his Bengal Tiger's spirit and strength, his intellectual powers and his genius for action, at the service of the nation in the arena of politics. No one can blame him for sticking to his post at the University when the Non-co-operation Movement blowed over it. But Asutosh might have anticipated Deshabandu Das in the days when he was Mayor of Calcutta, the head of an institution established by the Government and at the same, he was the redoubtable leader of the strongest party ranged against the same Government. Like Pandit Madan Mohun Malaviya he might have served and controlled the University as well as joined the political arena; if Pandit Malaviya could be true to the cause of political Freedom and, if he could champion it, as he has been doing in his heroic and dignified manner, more than two decades, without sacrificing the interests of the Hindu University which owes much of its prosperity—nay even its birth—to his unflagging zeal and untiring energies, surely it could not be altogether an impossible task for an intellectual giant and hero of action, for a versatile personality and resolute patriot of Asutosh's calibre, to divide his energies between politics and the University in a way not detrimental, but conducive to, the prosperity of both. No doubt it would have meant giving up much of the vantage ground he occupied, owing to his very important official position. It was his seat on the Bench, his innate abhorrence of the sensational, his deep-rooted dislike of the role



of the politician, and political agitation, which stood between him and the leadership in the political movement. Not only this; as we have said before, he was not a leader of the masses; and thanks to the progress of the political movements all the world over, which tends to enlarge the area of its influence and broaden its base, no one can direct or control them, unless he is fitted by nature and temperament to lead and sway multitudes and masses of the people. Had he chosen to plunge himself whole-heartedly into the political movement, what a tower of strength, what a great acquisition, what an irresistible force, what a determining factor he might have proved himself to be. With his immense organizing capacity and untiring energy, with his strategy and effectiveness, with his long vision and perseverance he would have undoubtedly influenced and changed for the better, the course of events and currents of thought in the sphere of politics and the history of the nation's struggle for freedom would have probably been different in some way or other; as the late Mr. Pat Lovett truly wrote,..."The Bureaucracy may thank its stars that he gave up to the Calcutta University the genius that could have made India a nation in the true sense of that hardworked and much abused phrase."

There is still another aspect of the question of Asutosh's connection with the Governmental institutions. Both the High Court and the University of



Calcutta were by far the principal scenes of his activities and absorbed his thoughts and energies; they also afforded ample scope for his genius and patriotism. But the present glory and prosperity of the University, which is entirely of Asutosh's making, has not been won without sacrifice on the nation's part; the nation has had to pay indirectly for its rise and progress; for institutions—specially great and growing institutions like the Calcutta University—are parasites,—just as the great men generally are. No great man is born and rises without absorbing the greatness of a host of his predecessors; 'nations, poets, artisans, women have worked for him and he enters into their labours'; and we have seen, not to speak of Ram Mohon Roy and Vidyasagar, Vivekananda and Bankim Chandra, intellectual giants and pioneers like Rajendra Lall and Mohendra Lall have devoted a life-time to pave the way for Asutosh who, when he came, absorbed and even eclipsed their greatness to all appearance. So the University, as it progressed in its triumphant and glorious career under the leadership of Asutosh, absorbed and eclipsed the life of other institutions—it even precluded the possibility of any other institution rivalling its pre-eminence or attaining a normal and healthy growth; nay, one may go farther and say that the University flourished at the cost of smaller and other institutions and its progress and prosperity of the latter. Not only did it attract and draw all the best intellect and



potential genius of the nation in the professoriate and the student; but it had at its helm, greatest organising genius and hero of work—which made it difficult for institutions and individuals outside its orbit to live and thrive. And not simply students and teachers only; the money and materials for original work that could only be utilized on its behalf might contribute to the rise and growth of other institutions in the country. And there might have been—there might be—other Universities, other flourishing centres of higher studies and researches, different homes of highest intellectual activities and original thinking which might have added to, and enriched India's contributions to the forward march of knowledge and truth, as well as India's own intellectual regeneration and cultural renaissance. And the academic spirit and advanced thought both in Europe and America tend to express themselves in the rise and development of various centres of learning and scholarship rather than be crystallized and stereotyped into one gigantic institution; variety of life and growth in the cultural and intellectual world would certainly make for diversity and excellence of cultural and intellectual output, for independence of spirit and originality of thought; and big institutions like big factories must aim at mass products and standardised results which have in their turn, a serious tendency to neglect the individual, individual genius and individual intellect except at the highest stage. And



inspite of the subtle but serious parasitic tendency of the Calcutta University, and apart from the Asiatic Society of Bengal, there are the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science, the Varendra Research Society and the National Council of Education which have amply justified their existence and have stood many attacks and onslaughts; that they are worthy of the greatest support and might have risen—or might rise—to greater eminence, had they been fortunate enough to have the support and sympathy of the country on a larger scale. Calcutta University which is a Government institution might well be taken care of by the Government; and who knows, what the history of higher education in Bengal, would have been if with his gigantic brain, the organizing genius and the constructive statesmanship, Asutosh would have worked, independently of the Government, for the non-Government institutions and Universities.

As we have already said, he would have been an invaluable asset, a great acquisition, to the National Congress, had he seen it fit to join it; but he chose to work for his country independently of the political and Congress movements of the day and even took upon himself to save his 'alma mater' from its sweeping onslaughts; he was drawn to the University, from his early youth, as it had placed at his disposal a world of materials which he was determined to work, improve and build upon; it made him a master in a great nation-building department—



gave him a vantage ground where his constructive statesmanship, his organizing and administrative powers as well as patriotism found ample scope. But we are free to admit that there are certain periods, certain junctures in the history of a people, struggling for a greater and fuller life and eager and almost impatient to wring the birth right of their freedom from the not overwilling hands of their foreign rulers, when disassociation with, and aloofness from, the main political organization and political movement, might appear to be an act of moral cowardice, folly or selfishness. But before Asutosh could be condemned on this account, it must be established that this political organization and the Congress movement had assumed such proportions as to be the sole and indispensable channel of the people's fight for their freedom and struggle for a larger and nobler life, and that he did not really strengthen the forces of freedom, or advance the cause of his country's larger and nobler life, by his actions and words outside the political arena.

Whether or not the political agitation and the Congress movement assumed such immense and all-important proportions as to demand, as of right, the enlistment and whole-hearted devotion of all the available men, we leave it to the future historian of our country to decide. But the great movement for freedom, for progress, for emancipation from all sorts of shackles and fetters, that has come to our country and come to stay, can, by no stretch of argument, be



interpreted to be confined within the four walls of the political movement; indeed, as we have seen before, it is much larger than the mere political movement; it has embraced our life as a whole and penetrated into all departments of our activities and thought, manifesting itself in our inner and outer struggle for a larger, fuller and truer life—individual, social, national and even cultural; as we have already said, it was, in fact, the unique glory of Asutosh to have advanced the larger cause of his country, to have laboured incessantly, to have struggled for, and devoted his massive intellectual powers and moral equipments to, the realization of that larger, fuller and truer life of his people; it was his one over-powering ambition, one overwhelming passion, one over-mastering obsession; his was a lifelong endeavour to herald the dawn of that glorious life, a life of which he had such alluring vision in his inspired mood. In the words of Emerson, his was 'a heart in unison with his time and country', so Desha-bandhu Das pithily said, 'his heart was with the nation', notwithstanding his association with the system of administration and with the institutions founded by our British rulers. In working, through the University, for the intellectual regeneration of his country at home, and for a world-wide recognition and glory of his motherland through the achievements of our alma mater, as well as in living his daily life—private and public—in the way he



lived, he served the greater cause of his country in a manifold way. One of the most brilliant and pre-eminent personalities of his age who shone in diverse departments of activities and thought he was the child of his country, always alive to its present distress and past glory; he identified himself with the life of the Indian in his habits, in his dress, in his manners and in his food, as few, very few, men of his position did; whether in the High Court or in the University or on a Committee, or a Commission, he championed—as only few men of his status did—the hopes and aspirations, the struggles and longings, of his people for a fuller and more glorious life. A professed educational reformer that he was, he deliberately worked for, as we have just said, for the intellectual regeneration of his people and for the recognition and reputation abroad of India's genius and capacity for literary and scientific achievements and varied scholarship; but there are some great men, towering head and shoulder over the so-called great men, the men of the hour, who accomplish many things unaware, who carry on much of their lifework unconsciously and without much labour and pain on their part; and Asutosh, without consciously and specially labouring for the purpose, advanced his country's larger cause and served its larger interests in the domains of social, political and religious reform and progress. His courageous act of remarrying his



tender-aged widowed daughter advanced the cause of social reform to a great extent; his living the simple, unostentatious, patriarchal life of his people set a thriving example of plain living and high thinking in the true sense of the words and went a long way in re-establishing old values of his country's dress and manners; his manly stand against the Government's obduracy, his practical enthronement of the principle of independence of spirit, his bold enunciation of the doctrine of 'freedom first, freedom second and freedom always', his lifelong efforts to translate it into practice—which in the words of the Hon'ble Justice Manmotha Nath Mukherjee—will go down to posterity as a great national asset, full of self-respect, furthered the cause of political advancement and national awakening immensely; for the movement for the national advancement and awakening received a great impetus at his resistance to Government's actions and policy, at his unique independence and unparalleled freedom of mind and love of freedom. A strict Brahmin, an orthodox Hindu—and a spiritually minded man—that he was, the way in which he adjusted the claims of the religiously regulated life of a pious Bengali with the multivarious demands and duties of the most prominent public man and busiest, most active and hardworking individual of his generation, the manner in which he reconciled the conflicting interests and injunctions of an old and outwardly



conservative faith with the trends of modern thought as well as his adjustment of his reforming zeal and the intellectual side of his nature with the tendencies of his unprogressive society and his retrogressive environment made for that readjustment, reconciliation, and reformation from within—the only ways through which our ancient religion or society can live and thrive in modern age and can assert itself as a guiding and controlling factor in the evolution of a world federation of nations and religions towards which humanity is marching stowly but surely.

As we have already said, Asutosh worked for the 'Return Movement' in India; he laboured to bring about a wide-ranging Indian Renaissance, an intellectual regeneration through a nation-wide progress of education; above all, he made it the mission of his life to blot out the stigma of India's cultural inferiority, to explode the fiction of her intellectual defeat and raise her once more to her lofty pedestal of glory. A statesman, builder and idealist, Asutosh's angelic eyes probed beyond the surface; in spite of her political subjection, the organized and subtle economic exploitation, the surging tide of western civilization and culture, which threatens to stamp out her own individuality, in spite of all these and more, India's soul is not dead yet and with his prophetic vision, Asutosh had a glimpse of India's eternal soul. No doubt she is bleeding, groaning and going under, under the heels



of a foreign Power and Civilization; yet the spirit of India's Culture and Civilization, her eternal soul, essentially creative and active, could and must be saved; no doubt, the threads of her external life, the controlling power and the initiative, in her politics, trade, commerce, finance and in her unlimited material resources is mostly in foreign hands; she is bound hand and foot, tied to the charriot wheels of a modern materialistic nation. But life is not all external—life is not all commerce and industries, politics and finance—however prominent factors they might be. Beyond and above all these, beyond the noise and bustle of politics, above the dust and din of controversy and conflicts of interests in trade and commerce, there is such a thing as culture and thought more subtle, more enduring, more abiding; and in the realm of culture and thought, where there is no naked display and ultimate sway of organized force and where the nations and individuals are not out—and out with a vengeance—to aggrandise and exploit, appropriate and exterminate each other—India can and must be made to hold her own against the nations of the world; she must rise to the height of her powers and potentialities of her genius; political subjection and economic exploitation notwithstanding, she must develop the best brains and utilize her best manhood in the select few in order to bring about a renaissance and regeneration which will, ultimately wipe out her political and economic subjection and give



her an honoured place in the economy of the nations.

The soul of a nation, like the individual's, is the mainspring of its outward life and the fountainhead of its strength and spirit; with all the glammer and glitter, with all the noise and bustle, apparently at the height of its power and glory, a nation might be really on the verge of decay and on the brink of death; all the material resources and worldly things at its command, the nation is sure to fall unless the soul lives and thrives, unless the inner spirit is sustained. When the inner life of our people was groaning under the weight of outward things and events, when its eternal soul was threatened to be crushed under the impact of a foreign culture and drowned in the surging tide of a foreign civilization, Asutosh set before himself the supreme task of saving and sustaining this inner life of our people, this soul of India, rousing it to its creative activities and products in a most effective way. No doubt the time was ripe; the materials were there and collected and ready to be utilized—still the glory of a pioneer was his. At a time when the capacity of Indian youth for research and original thinking were denied or doubted, when moreover, higher studies and researches were looked upon as a luxury, Asutosh had the vision and imagination to see that in the revival of Indian scholarship and culture, in the encouragement to Indian genius and



talents, in the highest stages of study and researches and in the nation-wide progress of a liberal education lies the salvation of our country—this intellectual regeneration was to be the secret of saving her soul and stimulating its creative power. With this end in view, with the object of saving, rousing and nourishing India's soul, he built the centres of highest studies and researches, the home of the most profound intellectual activities and original thinking in diverse departments of Science and Letters. But this soul, this inner spirit and greater life of a people which supplies the bed-rock of its outward existence and is the source of its abiding greatness and glory is invisible to all but inspired eyes and prophetic vision; none-the-less, it is the soul of a people which expresses and manifests itself in its arts and letters, in its science and song, in the greater, better and fuller life of the people—and not in the trival, matter-of-fact, humdrum life co-extensive with, and consisting in, the superficial, uneventful and petty works and activities. It is the outward life—the dust and din, the conflicts and controversies, the gold and glitter—which 'struts and frets its hour upon stage and is heard no more', not the inner life, the soul. But 'the poor player', the time-serving, noisy, self-satisfied individual busies himself with the petty things and little affairs on the surface; it is only the statesman and the prophet who cares for the hidden, inner life—the soul. Few have a vision of this inner



life, of this soul of a people, fewer are those who have the privilege of labouring for the revival of this glorious life, who have the good fortune to nurish and invigorate it; for the tendency of the mass-mind, of the average man, in this materialistic and scientific age is to take everything at its face-value, to care for the external, immediate results and not for the soul.

The appreciation of India's genius and contribution to the common heritage of humanity was long began; and the recognition by the better minds of the world of India's claim to equality on the plane of culture and thought was begun with 'the discovery of Sanskrit' more than a century ago. Profs. Max Muller, Muir Williams, Horace Wilson and their race in India and the generations of Orientalists in Europe—more particularly in Germany—and lastly the brilliant addresses and lectures of Keshov Chandra Sen in Europe and of Vivekananda in America raised India in the estimation of the western world.* But so far

* We are happy to refer, in this connection to what has been recently said by a notable journalist of the West :—"The appearance of Prof. Radhakrishnan upon the philosophical horizon together with such notable figures as J. C. Bose the botanist, P. C. Roy the chemist, Tagore the poet and Gandhi the reformer may be evidence of an intellectual awakening in India that will be compared with the Renaissance in Europe. It is an intriguing fancy that the day may come when the direction of student pilgrimages may be reversed and from Europe and America.



as marvellous progress of Science and of modern thought in all their aspects were concerned, Europe—European genius and culture—reigned supreme; and not only the mastery, but also, the homage of the world was hers. India was thought to have exhausted her genius and creative spirit in her monumental works in the ages past; original thinking and intellectual activities, researches and extensions of bounds of knowledge—as they are understood and practised in the West—were believed to be beyond young India; the mainspring of India's creative genius and the fountainhead of her intellectual activities were assumed to have dried up forever. India's contribution to the common heritage of humanity seemed to have come to an end once for all; and Indians were branded openly as incapable of original thinking and research work; as we have referred to, India's cultural and intellectual inferiority—specially of the young generation—were openly hinted at in the Imperial Legislative Council by responsible officials. The band of brilliant scholars, scientists and literary men who sprang up under Asutosh's fostering care and guidance and went abroad, proved to demonstration India's capacity for,

searchers after truth will journey to Calcutta, Madras, or Rangoon to learn from oriental masters the new wisdom of the east." It is no small part of Asutosh's lifework that he gathered round him in his University most of these world renowned savants and thinkers so as to make it a highest centre of intellectual activities and original thinking.



and mastery of, modern thought and science, which was supposed to be the unique privilege of the West alone. The vaunted advance of Europe in the various domains of science and letters, was not after all, the peculiar heritage of the western people. With scanty opportunity and scope, Indian intellect was shown second to none—even in those very branches of knowledge and learning, of research and original thinking which had their rise or their revival in Europe.

Apart, however, from what might be called this domestic side, his life work has a far wider and greater aspect, a subtle world significance which entitles him to an honourable place among the pre-eminent personalities of the world in our time. For a long time the nations of the world, the masses as well as the classes, have been fed up with false ideas and concepts of nationalism; they have been following false ideals in patriotism, misunderstanding and misrepresentation, mutual jealousies and rivalries, conflicts of cultures and clashes of interests had not only brought about the world conflagration that threatened to consume Civilization and Society but has left a legacy of world-wide distress and unrest, economic and political. War or no war, the nations are really in hostile camps—up in arms against one another. An inordinate yearning for wealth, an unseemly hunger for exploitation and aggrandisement have yawned the gulf between nations and nations—specially between the down-trodden Eastern



peoples and the powerful western nations. All the available statecraft and statesmanship, powers of organization and administration have been harnessed to the cause of 'national' prosperity and aggrandisement at any cost. Science has been tied to the chariot wheel of war-God ; and newer and newer monsters of destruction, newer and newer machines of death, newer and newer engines of devastation are invented and prepared for the annihilation of nations ; and every Power is anxious and eager to steal a march over the other.

But all this preparedness for, all this paraphernalia of war, all these engines of death and destruction, all the widespread jealousies and rivalries, clashes and conflicts, all the perversity that man has wrought in his being, can not alter the plan and course of evolution of a newer and truer humanity ; all these can not for ever retard the subtle march of mankind towards a closer understanding, and a truer and more abiding union ; all these can not obstruct the plan and aim of nature, which is peace and harmony, and not war and armament, unity and understanding and not distrust and jealousy, between nations and nations. And how is this peace, this understanding to be secured and strengthened ?--not through commercial or industrial rivalry, political and economic exploitation, nor through war and armament but through international sympathy and toleration, through internalization of Knowledge



and Learning ; it is only on the cultural and intellectual plane, that this international harmony and peace and amity can be first reached and safely retained. But most of the statesmen and the politicians, the merchant princes and industrial magnets, the financiers and lawyers who control and dominate, the affairs of the nations, leave international peace and understanding severely alone.

It is only the advanced spirits and idealists, solitary thinkers and lovers of humanity, men of long vision and imagination, who are anxious for international understanding and harmony, who care and labour for peace and progress among the nations of the world. Asutosh, inspite of the political subjection and economic exploitation, inspite of the prevalent myth of India's cultural and intellectual inferiority, dared to labour for this international understanding and harmony, by drawing, to his University, thinkers and philosophers, scientists and literary men from all parts of the world.

Intellectual giants and thinkers of the West like Paul Vinogradrauf, Hermann Oldenburg and Jacobi, Sylvain Levi and Pope, Young and Forsyth came to his University, came in contact with the students and teachers, and went away with first hand knowledge of India, of the currents of India's culture and thought ; on the other hand the many brilliant young intellectuals of our



generation whom Asutosh sought out and encouraged and helped into fame and eminence and whom he sent to Europe, made the greatest impression upon the cultural and intellectual world abroad and dispelled the illusion of Indian's inferiority in the domain of higher studies and researches and contributed not a little to the understanding of Indian life and thought by the West. Thus did he contribute to the international understanding and harmony and to the internationalization of learning and thought which must be the solid foundation of world peace and world harmony, the path along which humanity, and not simply nations and individuals, will tread in its forward march; thus he was not only a national hero but a world personality of his time.

But what will be the verdict of posterity upon the life and work of the great man of our country? how will the generations yet unborn look upon his career and lifework? what place will history assign him on the roll of India's illustrious sons? The hundreds and thousands of students whose education and enlightenment he promoted, the generation of enthusiastic young scholars and teachers of bright parts and possibilities that he nourished and encouraged and established in life, the countless men, that he was admired and adored,—and the many that he was criticised or maligned—by, the numerous individuals that he charmed and dominated,



the prominent European scholars and administrators whom he came in contact with, fascinated or dazzled, will all follow him, some day to the land 'from whose bourn no traveller ever returns'; and then?

And then, in Asutosh's own words, the sparks of the new inextinguishable fire kindled in our midst, 'that have already leapt to all parts of India,' will keep alive the sacred flame of learning and scholarship and scatter its light broadcast all over our country and over the world abroad, as it happened in the days of yore when the lamp of Knowledge and Truth lighted in India, illumined all the world; and 'the mighty spirit that has been aroused', at whose birth Asutosh and his predecessors and compatriots baptised, the spirit which he tendered and reared up with his heart's blood and life's vitals—spirit of service and sacrifice—the spirit of the patriot and of the nationalist—the spirit of enquiry, of Knowledge and research—the spirit of the scholar,—this mighty and majestic spirit 'will not be quenched'; on the other hand it will unfurl the banner of India's progress and prosperity in the modern age; it will herald the dawn of her resurrection, of her redemption and renovation, proclaiming in a new and commanding voice, the supreme truth of unity of life and harmony of the Universe! But perhaps it is too distant a consummation, too dim a future, too dreamy a destiny for practical and our immediate purpose.



It does not, however, require a prophetic vision to anticipate in a way the verdict of posterity upon Asutosh's life and lifework; our task is rendered easier as we have the benefit of the considered opinion and the deliberate judgement of a vareity of pre-eminent men—men of different classes and countries, of different religions and of diverse parties and creeds—who hold our hero to be one of the greatest and most striking Indians of his age. Prof. Radhakrishnan eloquently observed recently, "Among the makers of modern India, he is in the front rank. The historian of the Indian renaissance will accord him a place second to none among those who contributed to it"; we may safely assign Asutosh Mookerjee an honoured place on the roll of India's illustrious sons, among her 'inheritors of unfulfilled renown'; for much as he worked and achieved, he strove and aspired for—he dreamt much more—he would certainly have accomplished a great deal more, had he been born in a free country; and it can be said without fear of contradiction that he will be given considerable space in the history of his country—which he made and moulded in no little way—as a hero of work and action, as a representative man of his country and his time, as a builder and reformer in the realm of education and research, as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, friend and promoter of Indian Culture and History, of Indian,—and particularly Bengali—vernacular.



And a hero in the realm of work certainly he was throughout his life; he had all the ingredients of that true and rare heroism which found an exponent in Emerson; the heroic soul that does not 'sell its justice or nobleness' was certainly his; he was one of those heroic figures who, in their struggle to work out their mission, 'set opinion, success and life, at so cheap a rate, that they will not soothe their enemies by petitions or the show of sorrow', 'but will wear their habitual greatness'; no one, no Indian of his generation, had, in a greater measure, that characteristic quality of heroism—persistency; and it is the unparalleled persistency in his character that won him the wellknown title of Bengal Tiger, and that of British Bull-dog,—the latter from Sir Michael Sadler.

With this characteristic quality of heroism in abundance, his personality was brought into prominent relief besides his contemporaries—lesser men—who had, as they always have, wandering impulses, 'fits and starts of generosity'; but few could boast of such doggedness of resolution, of such iron persistency, in brief, such heroism. No one knew better, nor any one acted so much, up to the principle that 'it is easy within the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own'; and therefore he did not trim his sail to suit the passing fancy of the powers that be; nor did he care or long for the good opinion or applause of the world; but did what his conviction, his judgment aided by his intellect, dictated him; and he trode



the broad path he had long chalked out for himself, like 'the great man who, in the midst of the crowds keeps, with perfect sweetness, the independence of the solitude.' And a representative man of his country truly he was; for, he shared, championed and gave ample scope to, the longing and eagerness of his people for educational facilities; and by meeting this universal demand of his people, uplifted, his generation to a higher plane of thoughts and ideas, if not of activities, and hastened their pace of progress to their goal; for not only did he sympathise with but stimulated and encouraged actively many struggling higher tendencies of his countrymen—specially of the intellectual class, of the ablest and gifted few, in particular—in the domains of higher culture and studies and researches; above all he himself reflected in his own personality and character that confluence of ideas, that co-mingling of ideals, that synthesis of cultures, that happy and harmonious blending of diverse civilizations, hitherto flowing in different and, often, antagonistic channels, which seem to be the ultimate consummation inherent in the meeting of the East and the West!

As a builder of the manhood of the country, he stands very high indeed, the virulent criticism of his policy and principle notwithstanding; this budding manhood, in spite of all its failings and short-comings, moved Lord Ronaldshay to admiration with their 'patient



industry and quick responsiveness', no less by their 'impulsive enthusiasm, amounting at times to emotional abandon'; it is this manhood, which in the eloquent words of the late lamented Principal Trivedi, 'broadly and securely based upon the foundations of its own special culture, will assert itself in the presence of the manhood of the world'; he built this struggling manhood not only through, and under the auspices of, the University, but with the influence of the example of his own life; the new generation of scholars and students that sprang up under his fostering care, finds itself endowed with a new spirit, a new life and a new strength. As a creator of ample vision and imagination, and of courage and resourcefulness, he can point to a great institution, which has under his guidance and inspiration given Indian scholarship, Indian scientific and literary talents, their proper play and legitimate scope, and won India a recognised place in the world as a reputed centre of learning and research; he has, moreover, reinstated and reinstalled Indian Culture, Indian History and Indian Vernaculars in the University and has thrown open new vistas of glory, new fields of achievements, 'new Americas' in the words of Sir William Hunter—for the gifted and ablest of his countrymen to discover. If an institution, as Emerson says, 'is the lengthened shadow of one man', the growing, thriving, progressive, affiliating, teaching and research University in Calcutta—the University of



Colleges and of Post-Graduate classes—will go down to posterity as 'the lengthened shadow of one man'—Asutosh Mookerjee.

And no institution is so permanent as a University; in the midst of changes and transformations wrought by the march of civilizations and science, in the midst of rise and fall of parties and powers, the University, our University will stand as a sentinel of progress, as the guardian angel of knowledge and culture, as the 'free fountains of living waters and undefiled altars of inviolate Truth' proclaiming to, and reminding, the unborn generations of the glories of her 'greatest son.'

When all on a sudden, this prince among men fell one might say with—Theoclymenus in the Odyssey—'the sun has perished out of heaven.'

Let us conclude our imperfect study, with the words with which he brought to a close his last but ever memorable Convocation Address to the Calcutta University—words embodying his final and parting message—a message that ought to be engraved in letters of gold and imprinted in the tablet of our memory in letters of fire; declared the Bengal Tiger in his clarion voice: "Let it be remembered that there is some subtle salt or secret that keeps the Universities alive, that makes them indifferent to fortune or time. No human institution is so permanent as a University. Dynasties may come and go, political parties



may rise and fall, the influences of men may change but the Universities go on for ever as seats of trust and power, as free fountains of living waters and as undefiled altars of Truth.....

“Fellow graduates, you speak of this University as your Alma Mater. Do you always realize the nobility of this common place expression. What a singular endearment it voices —our fostering mother— what fine relation is that for a great institution of learning to bear to all those who throughout the years have learned wisdom at her feet and have gone out into the world, sustained by her strength and inspired by her lofty example..... But whatever sphere your lot may be cast, whatever your hopes and fears, turn back to your Alma Mater with filial piety and attachment,...Councils will come and go, Ministers will blossom and perish; parties will develop and disappear or change their nature and survive. But your University, my University, will live on for ever, if her children by thousands and ten thousands stand by her with steadfast loyalty and devotion, alike in her days of triumph and affliction. Unalterable is my faith as to her bright future, because I feel she must be a national organization, self-reliant though bound in service to the nation, adapting herself to the manifold and varying needs of the community, from generation to generation, I call upon you, fellow graduates, to join with me in the words of the warrior poet, in a solemn pledge of eternal



devotion to the spirit of our Motherland, the protecting divinity of our Alma Mater.

স্বদেশ আমার ! তোমার সেবার এ ব্রত লইবু আজি
পূজিতে তোমারে আনিব খুঁজিয়া ধরণীর ধনরাজি
তুমি যদি চাও প্রাণপ্রিয়ধন—দ্বিধা না জাগিবে মনে
সুধাব না কথা, প্রফুল্লবদনে, এনে দেব ও চরণে ।
আমার প্রাণের প্রীতি হবে দেবি ! তব পূজা উপচার
অবাধে সকলে সঁপিয়া তোমাঙ্গ, লইব সেবার ভার ।

I vow to thee my country—
all earthy things above,
Entire and whole and perfect,
the service of my love,
The love that asks no question ;
the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar
the dearest and the best
The love that never falters
the love that pays the price
The love that makes undaunted
the final sacrifice.”



487 CSL

APPENDIX



DEMOCRATIC CONTROL IN THE UNIVERSITY *

Sir Asutosh's Lucknow Speech.

"Mr. President and Members of the Lucknow University Union:—

It is my pleasant duty to offer you my sincerest thanks for the enthusiastic welcome you have accorded me this evening. I am not here to deliver an address on the democratic control of Universities; but I have agreed to join in the debate on this important matter as it is the burning topic of the hour. The speeches which have been delivered by

*The authorities of the Lucknow University Union utilised the presence of Sir Asutosh at Lucknow, in connection with the University Convocation, to arrange a debate on Tuesday the 8th January, 1924. There was a large assembly of University teachers and students, besides a distinguished gathering of European and Indian ladies and gentlemen, as it was anticipated that Sir Asutosh might be induced to join in the debate. The proposition for debate had been framed in the following terms :

'That, in the opinion of this House, the Ministers and the Councils are justified in exercising control over the administration of the Universities.'

Sir Asutosh was invited to participate in the debate. He responded, amidst enthusiastic cheers, with impromptu remarks which took up the best part of an hour.



the speakers who have preceded me, are so full of eloquence that you are likely to draw erroneous conclusions upon this difficult question. I have formed an inveterate habit, to scrutinise closely the terms of every proposition which I am called upon to adopt. I cannot avoid this course in respect of the proposition now before the House, namely, that the Ministers and the Councils are justified in exercising control over the administration of the Universities. Three gentlemen have warmly supported this proposition, while two have strenuously opposed it. Those that have supported it have, as I shall presently establish, given away their cases. But I advise them in advance that if they have not already taken to the study of law, they do so forthwith and adopt the legal profession as their career in life, because, I assure them, they will be the best defenders of rotten cases (Laughter). The proposition under consideration, I take it, refers to India alone; I further trust it is not too large an assumption to make that it refers to the present and not to the future. We are consequently called upon to examine the proposition in view of the provision of the existing constitution and in view of the present race of Ministers and Councillors; we are not concerned with the possibilities of the future. I now affirm without hesitation that the three gentlemen who have supported the proposition have placed themselves hopelessly out of Court. Each of them argued, by implication, at least, that the proposition



was expressed in terms so comprehensive that it could not possibly be approved by any gentleman who called himself educated in a University (Cheers). Each of them, in the course of argument, introduced qualifications with a view to restrict its operation. Whether this was done deliberately or under the stress of circumstances, I do not feel called upon to enquire (Laughter). The distinguished speakers all forgot, however, that it was not open to them to amend the proposition, as no notice of amendment had been given. But if amendments had been allowed, I am sure they would have exceeded 70, which I understand is the precise number of questions asked in the Court of the Benares Hindu University with reference to the possible or impossible misdeeds of its present Vice-Chancellor. We are thus called upon to examine, if the Ministers and the Councillors, under the Government of India Act, 1919 are justified in exercising control over the administration of the Universities. There is no limitation suggested here as to the nature extent of the control. There is no indication as to the possible qualifications of the Ministers and the Councillors, such as were tacitly assumed by one of the speakers. Consequently, if the proposition is affirmed, we hand over the Universities, to Ministers and Councillors—mighty Unknowns and mysterious Unknowables—and authorise them to exercise any kind of control they consider proper over the administration of the Universities in any form they choose (Prolonged cheers).



I pass on to scrutinize the significance of the term 'control' which is in high favour in superior circles ; it has an innocent look, but it excites my suspicion. One of the speakers treated it as equivalent to 'criticism'—instinct warns me that it is not so harmless ! Another speaker regarded the term 'control' as convertible with 'general control.' I cannot fix the bounds of this charmingly vague phrase, but I feel confident that if I were to frame a definition, it would be rejected by Ministers and Councillors. In any event, this much is incontrovertible that if A seeks to control B, the first essential that has to be established by him is that he is a fit and proper person to exercise such control over the other. When your Ministers and Councillors come and say that they will exercise control over the University, we ask, what are your credentials ? What are your qualifications ? Have you experience of University administration ? What is the basis of your judgment, the principle of your action ? Is your demand really authorised by the democracy (Cheers) ? I yield to none in this hall in my fervent admiration of democracy and democratic institutions ; at the same time, I realise the weaknesses and the dangers of democracy. When a democracy imperiously demands control over the University, I answer without hesitation, 'pause my friends, your claim will become admissible only when democracy ceases to be a democracy and is transformed into an intellectual aristocracy' (Cheers and Laughter).



What is the University ? It is the crown of our educational edifice. No University man will seriously suggest that we should hand over the control of the University to a democracy, which has not yet come under the influence, much less realised, the value, of the highest ideals of education in the life of the nation. Believe me, it is the function of the University to raise the nation, to guide the nation (Cheers, to elevate the leaders of the democracy, not to be guided by them (Hear, Hear). You have appealed to the lessons deducible from the history of other countries which enjoy the blessings of different types of democracy. There was no democracy more cultured than the democracy of the Greeks, the most cultured of the nations of antiquity the world has witnessed. Yet, it was this democracy which so grievously failed to recognise the sacredness of liberty of thought and speech that it made Socrates drink the juice of hemlock. Your democracy is not more cultured than the democracy of the Greeks, and yet you suggest that the Universities should be placed under democratic control. If your contention prevailed, do you imagine a Bacon would be given a place in your University or a Darwin be tolerated in the novel academic sphere (Cheers) ? ¹

¹ The names of Bacon, Darwin, Lavoisier, Laplace and many other immortal leaders of thought are carved on the walls of the Bennett Hall, where the debate was held.



You have spoken of your Ministers and of your Councillors. They are all excellent men, and let me assure you in all seriousness that I entertain genuine admiration for the way they have acquitted themselves in the discharge of their difficult duties. But when you assume that they are competent—each and all of them—to control the administration of the Universities, the dark shadows of doubt and hesitation imperceptibly creep over my mind. I mean no disrespect to their intellectual attainments, but I am so dense that I cannot really convince myself that they are qualified for their self-imposed task. My knowledge of the contents of the Government of India Act is, I am free to admit, not very profound. But I believe I am not in error when I state that the framers of that epoch-making statute have forgotten to insert a clause which might have required that every Councillor should have attained the high intellectual standard implied by a pass at the Matriculation Examination of the Calcutta University and that every Minister should have taken his Degree in Political Science in the University of Lucknow (Laughter). The truth is that there is no guarantee that a Councillor or that even a Minister is in any manner fit to exercise control over the administration of a University, if they were allowed an effective voice in the administration of the University, bad as we are, we shall rapidly get worse, and we shall soon be past redemption and reclamation (Laughter). Let me



tell you a story—what I am about to narrate is a real incident. A distinguished member of a Legislature told me, with refreshing frankness, that his grievance against me was that I had employed a Professor of Pali. I enquired if what was imputed to me constituted a crime. He answered, 'Pali is a dead language—more dead than even Sanskrit. You are a Brahmin. Why do you spend money on a Buddhist monk from Ceylon who teaches Pali to your pupils? if they take their Degree in Pali, they will not earn even five rupees a month.' I said, 'I plead guilty to the charge, but I shall not abandon my intention to turn out as many graduates in Pali as possible, to reform all future Councillors' (Cheers). That is the ideal of a fairly educated gentleman who is a member of the Council and is not yet a Minister. I cannot overlook another aspect of the situation—the Minister is a creature of party politics. Even if he be, when left to himself, inclined to behave as an enlightened man, he is bound to guide himself by the inclination of the party he has the privilege to represent (Cheers). One of the speakers said that a Minister might be trusted not to abuse his limitless authority, not to interfere needlessly with the administration of the University. But what is or is not needless, may have to be determined on non-academic grounds—the decision may be coloured by the exigencies of party politics. I shall not be surprised if a Mahomedan Minister of Education were driven to hold that as the



present Professor of Indian History in the University of Lucknow is a pious Brahmin from Bengal, his successor should be an orthodox Moslem from the Punjab. His judgment might be unconsciously affected by the circumstance that if he took up this position, he would not only capture the support of his party but would in addition place his salary beyond danger (Cheers). A suave non-Brahmin Minister in another part of India might well adopt a similar policy with regard to all University appointments, which, in the past, have, it is asserted, been monopolised by haughty Brahmins. If you get your University under a truly democratic Minister of Education, the first man to disappear would be Dr. Mookerjee—I mean not the astute economist but the dreamy historian (Cheers). The Minister may, with perfect justice—with the typical justice which would captivate his democratic followers or masters,—say, ‘I have never been able to understand what Dr. Mokerjee has realised, except his own salary (Laughter). He has explored the history of Ancient Indian Shipping. He has extolled the glories of Ancient Indian Commonwealths. But these are not present-day questions; they do not help the solution of the bread problem in the remotest degree. The Chair held by Dr. Mookerjee should accordingly be kept in abeyance, if not permanently abolished.’ The Professor, who would next find himself in predicament, would be Dr. Karam Narain Bahl (the Chairman). He is a



distinguished zoologist, but with all respect for him, the Minister and the Councillors may well ask, 'What has Zoology done for the progress of the race, except to establish that Man is descended from the Ape and still retains some of the virtues of his primeval ancestor? Zoologists supervise museums where extinct animals are preserved, and they publish unintelligible monographs on crabs and fishes'. So disappear into oblivion the Professor of Zoology and his assistants. The Professors of Mental and Moral Philosophy and of Experimental Psychology, if they exist in this University, will follow him in due course, until, alas, we shall have none left to advance the bounds of human knowledge except Chemists and Blacksmiths (Cheers).

Before you decide to adopt the proposition now under discussion, may I press you to pause and ascertain what happens elsewhere. We have been described as adroit imitators; but whether that be or be not a malicious untruth, our rulers have given us Ministers and Councillors in imitation of what has grown up in their own land in the course of centuries. Whether this has been wise or unwise statesmanship, it is fruitless to discuss—there are, as we all know, two opposing schools of thought on this as on all other subjects under the sun. The fact remains that the step has been taken by those in authority, and you have got your Ministers and Councillors. Now, if you study closely the history of the work of the Councils during the last three



years, you find that they have, in many instances, endeavoured to interfere in the internal administration of the Universities. We are followers of precedents, but we shall search in vain for a parallel from the history of the Mother of Parliaments. We have yet to learn that the British House of Commons sits solemnly to discuss the details of University administration in Leeds, Manchester or Sheffield (Cheers). What has been performed here could have been achieved only by the representatives of a new-born democracy. The substance of the matter is that democracy here has not yet been able to take its own bearings, to appreciate its duties and responsibilities, to realise vividly the dangers which encompass it and may retard its development. Friends and admirers of democracy—I venture to include myself in this category—will best promote the true interests of democracy, if they counsel caution and circumspection (Loud cheers).

Let me pass on to a line of argument which, I am free to admit, did not powerfully appeal to me. That argument took this form. 'The bureaucracy we have been accustomed to meet has been composed of foreigners and consequently bureaucracy is bad. The democracy which we have now to face consists of our countrymen and consequently democracy is good. We Indians are all good; the foreigners are all bad' (Cheers). It will take me a long time to convince myself that this is the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Meanwhile I am prompted



to enquire, may not one phase of the problem have been overlooked? May not the Indian Democracy be quite as bad as the British Bureaucracy, perhaps worse (Laughter)? May not modern history verify the adage of the sage of antiquity that enfranchised freed men are often the most exacting tyrants? Is it beyond the range of possibility that a so-called 'popular' Minister may be a wolf in disguise and may prove to be a bureaucrat in the garb of a democrat, ready to play a game which no genuine hereditary bureaucrat would ever have ventured (Cheers). I maintain with some confidence that it is wise for all of us to act cautiously and not to extend the scope of so-called 'control,' till the new system, like all other human institutions, has been tested in the crucible of experience. Ministers and Councillors do not justify themselves by the mere fact of their existence and the glamour of the position they occupy. Let them have, by all means, a fair chance; but let them not seek to exercise control over educational institutions of the highest type, till they have by their deeds, inspired confidence in their ability to meet their obligations in other domains more within the limits of their capacity.

I have returned to the point from where I started. Let me now ask how soon the day is likely to come when democracy will be fully fit to control the activities of Universities as organs of the State for the development of education of the highest grade. I confess I cannot form an estimate. That day has



not yet arrived in the history of the most progressive nations of the West, not in England, not in France, not in America. At the same time I am anxious that my position should not be misunderstood. I do not maintain that the Universities should stand aloof from the life of the nation. Education is a sacred national trust. The people who who dedicate their lives in the cause of education, work for the nation ; and it would be a calamity if they were completely isolated from the main stream of national activities. The labourers in the field of education should come in contact with society in its diverse phases and should be ready to profit by criticism. This does not imply that they should be guided by uninformed and unintelligent criticism. I am not afraid of criticism, I am not afraid of publicity, even when, I find a question like this put to me ; 'is it true that 80 per cent, of the Hindu students passed in Sanskrit and 50 per cent. of the Mahomedan students passed in Arabic ? Does this imply that the examination in Arabic is stiffer than that in Sanskrit ? Does this also imply that the Vice-Chancellor, a Brahmin, has influenced the passes in Sanskrit ?' Questions like these only help to bring democracy into discredit and ridicule. But apart from such effervescences, there can be no doubt that the problem of reconstruction of a University, so as to bring it into intimate touch with the life of the nation and at the same time to preserve the freedom of its academic activities, is by no means free from



difficulty. One of the speakers referred to the distinction between academic and administrative work. The dividing line cannot always be sharply drawn ; never-the-less the distinction is real and is well recognised. There may consequently be two Bodies in the University, one concerned with academic work, the other with administrative work. It is on this latter Body that intelligent and enlightened Councillors should find a place. There will thus be established a link between the members of the Legislative Council who have control over the national purse and the members of the profession of education who formulate academic ideals. I do not apprehend that such a constitution will be easily shattered into fragments. I am not afraid of the inclusion of non-academic men in the Court of a great University. They will soon find their level, (Laughter), and when they come into close contact with University teachers, they will discover that academic men manage their work creditably even from the point of view of the purse. I look forward with hope to a common platform where academic men, who constitute the backbone of the University, may meet on equal terms with non-academic men, who have entered the Legislative Councils. Let them discuss frankly all questions of policy, for instance, whether the University of Lucknow should open a Department of Agriculture at a cost of Five Lacs to the State. Such a topic as this may and should be fruitfully discussed by a mixed Body of the type



indicated. But I cannot lend my support to a scheme which makes academic work subject to the control of non-academic men, specially of men whose actions are apt to be inspired by political motives or partisan considerations. I do not forget the claim which has sometimes been put forward that the Minister is entitled to control the financial administration of the University on the theory 'that the man who pays the piper is entitled to call for the tune.' I have never come across a more transparent fallacy. Can the Minister be said to pay the piper? Does the money which he calls upon the Council to vote constitute his patrimony or his self-acquisition (Laughter)? Is he not the custodian—sometimes a very temporary custodian—of funds which have been contributed by you and others like you for the benefit of the State? Is it not possible that men who are skilled in the affairs of the University and who have devoted their lives to its development, are far more deeply interested in the institution than a Minister who has no acquaintance—intimate or superficial—with University administration? Is it at all improbable that a Minister, summoned to office from party considerations, may not only have no aptitude for the work entrusted to him, but may be turned out of office by an adverse vote of the Council, if he is not over-anxious to enjoy his handsome salary? I venture to think that a Minister who poses as the flower of democracy cannot consistently exercise autocratic and bureaucratic powers over the Uni-



versity (Cheers). There is no country in the modern world where State control of high education was more stringent, more rigorous, than in Germany, and the civilised world has witnessed its baneful consequences. No University can flourish unless its Professors possess that priceless treasure which we call freedom of thought (Cheers). If I were a University Professor I would without hesitation, decline to mould my opinions in matters of history, economics, religion, philosophy and science to suit the arrogance or ignorance of a Minister of Education, however elevated his rank in the Warrant of Precedence. On what principle, sacred to democracy, is it claimed that decisions of the University,—whether they be on questions academic or administrative is immaterial for the present purpose—should be submitted to the Minister for confirmation or rejection, as if he were an all-knowing and never-erring Angel from Heaven? The danger is equally grave whether such autocratic intervention is made all-pervading or is restricted to concerns financial. The grip of the Iron Hand may be tightened, as we all know in ways diverse and devious, and complete surrender to the will of the financier secured, so that half the Professors may be Brahmins, half non-Brahmins, or a fourth Christian and three-fourths Moslem (Cheers). Put not into the hands of the Government a weapon which may be used for the punishment of a University teacher whose views and influence are distasteful to the men at



the time in power ; encourage not sycophancy and keep the University as independent organs of opinion in the community. Let me assure you that the proposition before the House is pregnant with incalculable danger, and, may, if logically extended, destroy the fabric of the State. When all Departments of the State become Ministerial—none Reserved—will you demand that Law and Justice should be administered by the Courts under the control of the Minister and the Councillors ? Will you demand that military campaigns should be conducted under the wise guidance of brilliant civilians ? One of the speakers this evening, with evident satisfaction, referred to laymen as Secretaries for War—he prudently overlooked that this had sometimes led nations into disaster and that many people would not hesitate for a moment, if they were called upon to make a choice between a Churchill and a Kitchener (Cheers).

Finally, let us look at the problem from the theoretical standpoint. The State must discharge its manifold functions through Bodies properly constituted. The duty of the State with regard to higher education is performed through the medium of the Universities, as the appropriate organs created for this special purpose. Once you have framed a constitution for a University, leave it free. If you find that the constitution has failed let the legislature interfere and alter the constitution. But it is a contradiction in terms that you have a



University entrusted by the State with the discharge of the very responsible duty of promotion of higher education and yet you contemplate interference on every possible and impossible occasion. That position is intolerable; and in the light of conditions, educational and political, here and elsewhere, I confidently ask you to reject the motion and to make an insistent demand for autonomous self-governing Universities, in intimate touch with the life of the Nation and yet free from external control—free from political fetters from the State, free from ecclesiastical fetters from religious corporations, free from civic fetters from the community. Thus and thus alone can the Nation, under the vitalising influence of a creative, an independent centre of Thought, work out its moral as well as intellectual salvation, in touch alike with the experience of the past and the aspirations of the future (Prolonged cheers*)."

* The House then divided and the resolution was declared lost by an overwhelming majority.



IDEALS OF VICE-CHANCELLORSHIP
Correspondence between
Lord Lytton and Sir Asutosh

Government House
Calcutta.

24th March, 1923.

Dear Sir Asutosh,

With reference to the Vice-Chancellorship about which I spoke to you on Wednesday last, I am well aware that this office has entailed upon you a heavy burden of work, and that though a post of honour and responsibility, it is not coveted by you for any reason except a wish to serve the University which you love, and to the welfare of which you have devoted your life. As you know, the appointment has to be made not by the Chancellor but by the Local Government - that is to say, by the Governor and the Minister jointly, and we both wish to know to what extent we can count on your co-operation. I am anxious to retain your services in this post because I feel that your powers and your attainments are of great value to the University and to the cause of higher education in Bengal. But if those powers and attainments are used in opposition to the



Government in the belief that you are thus serving the interests of the University, your continued occupation of the post would be impossible.

You have seen our Bill, you have heard from me on more than one occasion that in framing it we are anxious to retain the largest measure of academic independence which can be secured for a University which is bound to Government in its origin and in its constitution and which is at present in need of financial assistance. I have asked for your suggestions, and I should welcome your criticism, provided it is offered as a fellow-worker and not addressed to outside bodies. The continuance of the course you have followed during the last few months would entirely preclude my favouring your reappointment. Hitherto you have given me no help; you have on the contrary used every expedient to oppose us. Your criticisms have been destructive rather than constructive; you have misrepresented our objects and motives, and instead of coming to me as your friend and Chancellor with helpful suggestions for the improvement of our Bill, you have inspired articles in the Press to discredit the Government; you have appealed to Sir Michael Sadler, to the Government of India and the Government of Assam to oppose our Bill. All this has been the action not of a fellow-worker anxious to improve the conditions of co-operation between the Government and the University, but of an opponent of the maintenance of any connection



between the two. I should not complain of this if you avowed yourself an open antagonist and 'said to me frankly, "in the interests of the University I am obliged to oppose your policy and cannot co-operate with you." But in that case, you could not expect the Government to retain you as a colleague and ask you to continue as Vice-Chancellor.

I invite you at this time when the Vice-Chancellor's office must be filled anew—a time which is also one of momentous consequence to the University—to assure me that you will exchange an attitude of opposition for one of whole hearted assistance, for in our co-operation lies the only chance of securing public funds for the University without impairing its academic freedom. If you will do this, if you will work with us as a colleague and trust to your power of persuasion to get what you consider the defects in our Bill amended, if you can give an assurance that you will not work against the Government or seek the aid of other agencies to defeat our Bill, then I am prepared to seek the concurrence of my Minister to your re-appointment as Vice-Chancellor and I am confident that we can produce a Bill which will both secure the approval of the Legislative Council and be of lasting benefit to the University. If you cannot conscientiously do this, you must make yourself free to oppose me by ceasing to be Vice-Chancellor.



I shall be glad to hear from you before Tuesday and I await your answer with the hope that whatever your decision may be, it will make the future easier for both of us.

Believe me, your sincerely,
Lytton.

Hon. Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, Kt., C.S.I., M.A. D.L., etc.

Sir Asutosh's Reply.

Senate House,
Calcutta.

26th March, 1923.

Dear Lord Lytton,

I am in receipt of your letter dated the 24th March which reached me on Saturday evening after I had returned home from the Convocation. I shall in my reply speak without reserve and hesitation as you have made most unjust and unmerited imputations on my conduct.

Before I record my views on your offer to reappoint me as Vice-Chancellor and the conditions that accompany it, I shall deal with your remarks on my attitude towards the proposed scheme of legislation. I cannot reproduce here the contents of the correspondence which has passed between you and me on this subject, but it seems clear that



you could not have refreshed your memory by its perusal before you criticised my conduct. You could not possibly have forgotten that in the letter which I wrote to you on the 4th November, 1922 after I had received a copy of the University Bill from Mr. Mitter, I expressed in unmistakable terms my disapproval of its contents and the principles underlying it. That Bill came upon me as an absolute surprise. Mr. Mitter, you might remember, asked for my personal opinion. In your letter dated the 8th November, 1922, you distinctly wrote to me that Mr. Mitter had told you that the Senate of the University had been consulted officially but that my personal opinion had not been invited. This, as I intimated to you later, was the exact opposite of truth. This was followed by protracted correspondence and interviews with you in the course of which I explained to you my views upon the draft Bill. At length on the 11th January, 1923 you gave me permission to consult the Members of the Senate on the provisions of the Bill. At about the same time I received from you a copy of the Secondary Education Bill; all information regarding its contents, though repeatedly asked for, had been kept back by the Government from the University. The Senate, thus placed in possession of the two Bills, appointed a Committee to report on their provisions. Before the views of the University could be formulated and communicated to you, you adopted, inspite of my earnest protests and the



remonstrance of the Senate, an absolutely indefensible course. You forwarded the Bill or Bills to the Government of India with a view to obtain its sanction to introduce them into the Legislative Council. If you refer to the correspondence, you will find that I and my colleagues on the Senate made a desperate effort to convince you that as the Bills were open to grave objections, they should not be adopted as Government measures before full and searching enquiry. Our appeals and protests were totally disregarded. You now make a grievance that I have used every expedient to oppose your Government to arrest the progress of the measures. You complain that I have appealed to the Government of India and the Government of Assam. You will be surprised to hear that what I have done has been perfectly constitutional. In your letter dated the 11th January, 1923, you stated explicitly that I would be free to take what steps I please to discuss the Bill with the Members of the Senate. In my reply dated the 14th January, 1923, I stated that in view of the importance of the questions raised, I had decided to give an opportunity to every Member of the Senate to discuss the provisions of the Bills. The Senate, it may not be known to you, includes His Excellency the Governor of Assam, the Member of the Council of the Governor-General in charge of the Department of Education, the Minister for Education in Assam and the Director of Public Instruction in Assam. The papers



were forwarded as confidential documents to each of these gentlemen. If I had withheld the papers from them, they would have been entitled to make legitimate grievance against me. If the result has been that they have formed an unfavourable opinion of the measures devised by your Government, and have taken such steps as they consider necessary and proper, you may regret it, but surely that is not a ground for complaint against me. You also make a grievance that I have appealed to Sir Michael Sadler. Your Government, notwithstanding my advice and the advice of the Senate, has unceremoniously rejected the recommendations made by the Commission over whose deliberations Sir Michael Sadler presided. If I have intimated this fact to Sir Michael Sadler—a fact which has been a matter of public knowledge for many weeks past—I did it in the best interests of the University and of the country. Again, you do not hesitate to assert that I have inspired articles in the Press to discredit your Government. This is a libel and I challenge you to produce evidence in support of this unfounded allegation.

You complain that my criticisms have been destructive rather than constructive. Yes, the criticisms have been destructive of the provisions of the Bills which appeared to me and to my colleagues on the Senate to be most objectionable, framed, as we did not hesitate to record, from a political and not an educational standpoint. You seem to regret



that our criticisms have not been constructive, but you have never cared to invite the University to frame a constructive scheme for the benefit of your Government. I have, on more than one occasion, as you will no doubt recollect, offered to draw up a Bill with the assistance of my colleagues on the Senate and representatives of your Government—but I have received no response. You complain that I have hitherto given you no help. I maintain that I have constantly offered you my help and advice which, for reasons best known to you alone, you have not accepted. I have written to you letter after letter—even in the midst of terrible sorrows*—commenting in detail on the provisions of the Bills. You have never cared to reply to the criticisms thus expressed. On the other hand, although I found from your letter dated 11th January, 1923 that you were convinced that the proposed amendments were, as predicted by me, impossible of accomplishment in an amending Bill, I discovered much to my surprise a few days later that you were determined to push on the amending Bill and send it up to the Government of India for sanction. Again, the Report of the Committee on the two Bills (which we took great pains to prepare) minutely criticised their clauses and challenged the ideal that lay beneath them. You have never recorded your

* Asutosh's widowed daughter—whom he thought it his duty to remarry in the face of social ostracism—died during this period.



opinion on our views. You have not even given me the opportunity to discuss the report with you. On the other hand, I cannot overlook that your letter to me dated 15th February, 1923 made it quite clear that you did not realise the gravity of the issues and you did not hesitate to express your impatience at the space that our criticisms occupied. I notice that you charge me with having misrepresented your objects and motives. I most emphatically repudiate this unfounded charge. On the other hand, it would be interesting to know whether, when you stated to the Legislative Council that your 'anxiety to consult the authorities of the University and to obtain their support as far as possible, was responsible for the delay,' you were already aware of the attitude taken up by the Government of India. If you have the courage to publish to the world all the documents on the subject and the entire correspondence which has passed between us, I shall cheerfully accept the judgment of an impartial public.

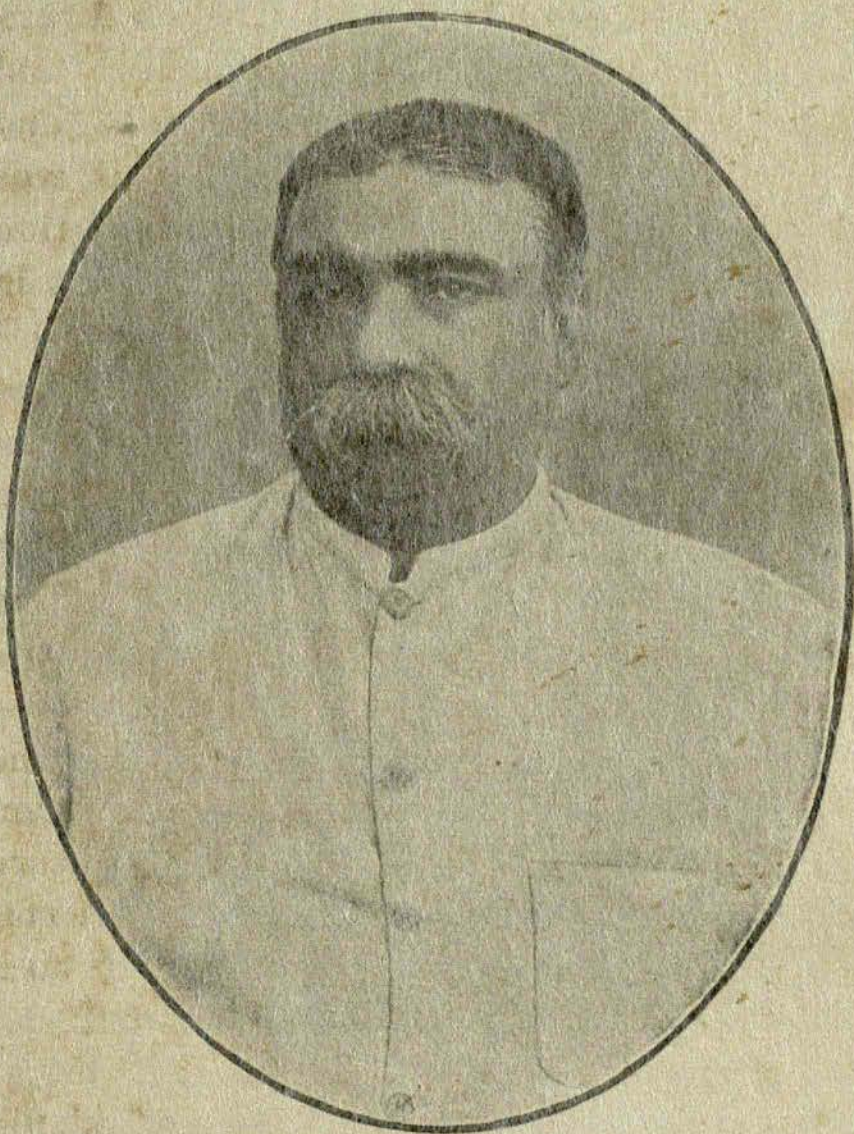
I shall finally consider your offer to reappoint me as Vice-Chancellor subject to a variety of conditions. There are expressions in your letter which imply that I am an applicant for the post and I am in expectation of reappointment. Let me assure you that if you and your Minister are under such an impression, you are entirely mistaken. You ask me to give you a pledge that I shall exchange an attitude of opposition for one of whole-hearted assist-



ance. You are apparently not acquainted with the traditions of the high office which I have held for ten years. I was first called upon to accept the office of Vice-Chancellor by that God-fearing soldier, the late Earl of Minto. He did not bind me with chains but on the other hand expressly enjoined me to work in concurrence with the Senate in such manner as might appear to my judgment to be in the truest interests of the University. We had in fact many open conflicts with the views of the Government in those days; you will however be interested to know that at the Convocation on the 12th March, 1910 Lord Minto referred to me in the following words: 'Now that my high office is drawing to a close I rejoice to feel that the administration of this great University will continue to benefit from your distinguished ability and your *fearless courage*.' During the time that Lord Hardinge was Chancellor of the University, we had many an accute difference with the Government, and as Vice-Chancellor I never hesitated to express my disapproval of Government measures when they appeared to me to be injurious to the interests of the University. Lord Hardinge had the generosity repeatedly to congratulate me on the bold stand we had from time to time made against the views maintained by his Government. When two years ago, at the insistent request of Lord Chelmsford and Lord Ronaldshay, I accepted their invitation to hold the post of Vice-Chancellor, I stated distinctly that I would spare no efforts to



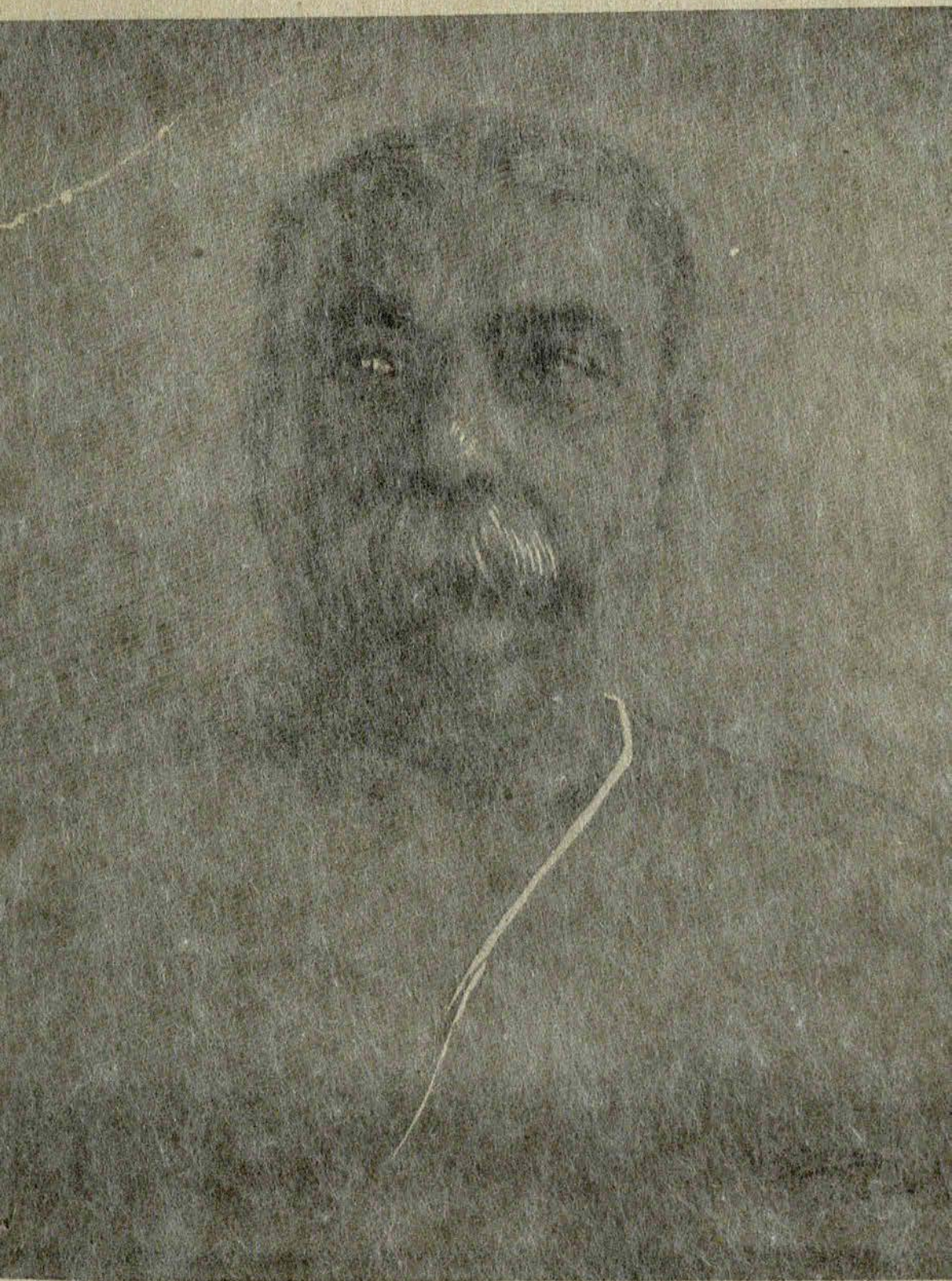
devote myself to the services of the University and to promote, to the best of my judgment and ability, the truest interests of my *Alma Mater* which have been always dearest to me. From the conversation that I had with Lord Ronaldshay at that time, I discovered that no one appreciated more keenly than he the need and value of a thoroughly independent Vice-Chancellor. Let me assure you that this high tradition was not created by me. It was my privilege to work as a Member of the Syndicate with eight successive Vice-Chancellors during a period of seventeen years, before I was called upon to accept that post, and most, if not all of them, were eminent men imbued with the traditions of the office from the time of their predecessors. Many of the occupants, ever since the days of our first Vice-Chancellor, Sir James Colville, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, have been men who had taken oath to administer justice in the name of their Sovereign. To them it would have been a matter of astonishment to be told that, as Vice-Chancellors, they were expected to adapt themselves to the views of the Government simply because it was the Government which had the appointment in its gift. I have, I maintain, scrupulously adhered to the cherished traditions of my office and it has never entered into my mind, during the last two years, that I was seriously expected to adapt myself to the wishes of your Government. Surely, my attitude towards the policy adopted by your Government in



In his usual dress.



516 CSL



Bengal Tiger.



"... The flowers will fall and fade and die and we who stand here will pass away but his memory will remain. ..."

Sir Ewart Greaves.



the matter of University legislation has been quite familiar to you for some months past, and you have never before this ventured to convey a suggestion to me that my action as Vice-Chancellor has been unworthy of my office. I quite realise that I have not in the remotest degree tried to please you or your Minister. But I claim that I have acted throughout in the best interests of the University, notwithstanding formidable difficulties and obstacles, and that I have uniformly tried to save your Government from the pursuit of a radically wrong course—though my advice had not been heeded. I am not surprised that neither you nor your Minister can tolerate me. You assert that you want us to be men.* You have one before you, who can speak and act fearlessly according to his convictions, and you are not able to stand the sight of him. It may not be impossible for you to secure the services of a subservient Vice-Chancellor, prepared always to carry out the mandates of your Government, and to act as a spy on the Senate. He may enjoy the confidence of your Government but he will not certainly enjoy the confidence of the Senate and the public of Bengal. We shall watch with interest the performances of a Vice-Chancellor of this type, creating a new tradition for the office.

* In his Convocation Address at the Dacca University Lord Lytton exhorted his the young men of the country—specially of the University—to be 'men'.



I send you without hesitation the only answer which an honourable man can send—an answer which you and your advisers expect and desire : I decline the insulting offer you have made to me.

Yours sincerely,

ASUTOSH MOOKERJEE

His Excellency the Earl of Lytton, G.C.I.E.



INDEX

A

Asutosh's rural home	21
His birth	23
His admission into school	25, 30
His early ambitions and proficiency in Mathematics	27, 34, 35
His admission into Presidency College	37
Publication of a thesis of his in England	38
His degree examinations—B. A. M. A. P. R. S.	44, 45, 47, 48
His refusal of Government service	49
His articleship under Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh	52
His election to the Senate and Syndicate on the University	53, 54
His famous Resolution in the Senate	55
His doctorate	57
Appointment to the Tagore Professorship	57, 58
Election to the Bengal Legislative Council	58
Nomination to the Corporation	58
Election to the Imperial Council and his part in the Universities Bill	59
His elevation to the Bench	51, 52,
Appointed to the Vice-Chancellorship	63, 64 ff
Presentation of an Address to Their Majesties the King and Queen	65, 66
Asutosh's part in framing the new Regulations	64, 65, 183, 225, 226
His task after assumption of office	183 ff, 259
His reforms in schools and colleges	184, ff
He presided over the Post-Graduate Consolidation Committee and the Post Graduate Councils of Teaching in Arts and Sciences	202, 203
He is appointed to the University Commission	69, 70, 201, 202
His gift to the University	205
His second Vice-Chancellorship	206
Financial crisis	206



Reform controversy	207 ff
Criticism and appreciation of his work	226, 227, 230 ff
Effects of his achievement	240, 241, ff
His position in public life	249, 250
His politics	255, 256
His views on the University and the body politic	257
Students and politics	261, 262
Conflict of his policy and action with Mahatmaj's	263, 264 ff
His bold stand against Non-co-operation Movement in Bengal	265
The two standpoints	266 ff
His idealism and faith in India's future	345, 346 ff
Various public activities	68, 69
Becomes Acting Chief Justice	71
Takes up Dumroan Case and His death	71, 73, ff
Last Journey to Calcutta—Nation's Grief	75, 76
His filial affection and remarriage of his widowed daughter	79, 80, 81
His Library	113, 114
His encouragement to scholars	106, 107
His versatile scholarship	114, 115 ff
His brilliance as a Mathematician and European fame	128, 129, ff
His life-work	135, 136, 137
His brilliant record on the Bench	139 ff
Asutosh's appearance	404, 405
Complexity of his character	406
Asutosh unlike Tilak, Deshabandu, Mahatmaji, Rabindra Nath	407 ff
The synthesis in his character	410, 411, 412-449
Asutosh and Tilak	416
Asutosh and Disraeli	416, 417
Asutosh and Chittaranjan	442 ff
Striking tributes to his genius and character	450, ff
Asutosh's was not the responsibility for the Act of 1904	455
The over-crowding of the legal profession	456, 457 ff
His association with the Governmental institutions and aloofness from the Freedom Movement in the political sphere	459 ff



INDEX

521

His contribution to the forward Movement	465 ff
Asutosh, a world personality	475 ff
Virdeet of posterity	478 ff
Asutosh's Message	484 ff
Address, By the H. M. The King Emperor	65, 66
Asquith	122
Act of Incorporation	173, 179, 188, 189
Act, Indian Universities	176, 177, 181, 182, 183 ff, 295, 319, 455
Act, Morley-Minto	251
Act, Government of India of 1919	251
All India Moslem	
Educational Conference	69
Aurobinda Ghosh	355
Asiatic Society of Bengal	461
Act, Vernacular Press Gagging	387

B

Bannerjee Ganga Dhar	31
Bosu, Annada Prosad	34
Booth, Dr. William	45, 53
Bannerjee, Sir Surender Nath	376, 388, 390, 47, 135, 175
Bose, Mr. (now Sir) B. K.	60, 61
Bhim Nag,	86
Bannerjee, Panchkori	103
Bengal Tiger	99, 305, 420, 421
Bannerjee, Dr. Sir Guroodas	174, 331
Bose, Mr. A. C	115, 129, 132, 134
Bryce, Lord	121, 417
Boole	132, 133
Bomphas, Mr. C. H.	144, 145
Bentinck, Lord William	172
Boards of Higher Studies	203, 291
Basu, J. N.	209
Butlar, Sir Hureut,	210
Basu, Mr. Bhupendra Nath	215
Bose, Dr. Sir J. C.	226, 227, 245, 287
Bankipur Bengalee Literary Conference	67, 357



Bose, Ananda Mohun	309, 353, 391 ff
Bangalore Institute of Science	323
Bankim Chandra	330, 385
Besant, Dr.	353
Bourbons	373
Bolshevesim	373
Brahma Samaj	375, 376 ff
Bengali Characteristics	400 ff
British Bulldog	422
Bengali literary genius	380

C

Chikitschaproakash, poineer medical work in Bengalee by Dr. Gangaprokash.	24
Cambridge Messenger of Mathematics	38, 129, 130
Craford, Sir Alfred	49, 54
City College	50
Curzon, Lord	62, 84, 174, 182, 243
Carmaichael, Lord	76, 209, 435, 455
Chatterjee, Dr. Sunity Kumar	106
Cayley, Prof. Arther	117, 129, 133
Calcutta Mathematical Society	131
Cunningham, Lt. Col. Allan	133
Clause 26, 25 of the Letters Patent	148, 150, 151, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158
'Calcutta Weekly Notes'	161
Craddock, Sir Reginald	210
Calcutta University Commission	70, 71, 201, 202, 211, 223, 227, 237, 242, 243, 457
Chaudhuri, Sir A.	212, 447, 448
Campbell, Major	218
Chelmsford, Lord	68, 201, 206
Cotton, Sir Henry	329
Coomar Swami, Dr.	358
Commission, Lord Ripon's (University)	173
Chacravarti, Shyam Sundar	406
Calcutta Review	129, 422



INDEX

523

Convocation Address, Asutosh's last	484 ff
Do. Do. of 1914	200, 201, 346

D

Das, Madhusudan, M.A., B.L., C.I.E.	32
Disraeli	9, 33, 416, 420
Maharsi Devendra Nath,	374
Das, Mr. Justice, P. R.	73
D'santos, Mr. H. C.	101
Despatch of 1854,	172, 173
Das, S. R.	204
'Ditcher' in the 'Capital'	209, 214
Das, Sarat Chandra,	218
Desabandhu Chittaranjan Das	71, 262 ff, 322, 332, 353, 408, 441 ff, 452, 466, 460, 358, 416
Dutt, Mr. R. C.	331
Dadabhoy Naroaji	354, 392
'Discovery of Sanskrit'	473
'Democratic Control in the University'	489 ff
Dramas of Dinobandhu	385

E

Extension of Theorem of Solmons, A Paper by Asutosh	46, 130
Emerson	3, 12, 78, 137, 366, 441, 466
Edward's Differential Calculus	130, 131
Educational Colonies Association in England	279
Elizabethan, Period	372

F

Fuller, Sir B.	108, 342
Forsyth, Dr. Andrew	130, 199
'Forward'	160
Film University in America	335

G

Ghosh, Sishir Kumar	402
Ghosh, Dr. Sir Rash Behari	252, 413, 52 ; 135, 193, 194



Ghokhale, Mr.	13, 59, 60, 88, 252, 287, 332, 353
Greaves, Sir Ewart,	77, 215, 239, 297
Ghosh, Mr. Hemendra Nath,	95
Gladstone, Mr.	120, 121
Grey, Lord	122
Government of India's, Letters to the University and Resolution.	195, 296
Gishe Lobzang Targe	2 6
Graduates, average annual number of	224
Gandhi, Mahatma	262 ff. 409, 416, 430, 459
Garibaldi,	272
Great English Men of the Sixteenth Century.	414

H

High Court, Calcutta	57, 137 ff
Hornell.	90
Holland, Rev. Mr. W. E. S.	102
Hartog, Sir P. J.	99, 126, 417, 450
Haldane, Lord	245, 324
Howells, Dr. George	451
Hunter, Sir William	483

I

Ilbert, Hon'ble, Mr. (Sir) C. P.	48, 51, 53, 171
Indian Penal Code, Sec. 34	151, 153, 157, 158
'Indian Daily News'	160
Iyer, Sir P. S. Sivaswamy	165
Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science,	191, 464
Imperial Legislative Council	251, 252
Indian Renaissance	367 ff, 469
'Ideals of Vice-Chancellorship'	506 ff
Indian Education	171 ff

J

Jirat Balagar, Asutosh's birth place	21 ff
Jenkins, Sir Laurance	146
Jacobi, Dr Hermann	198



INDEX

525

James, Mr.	238
Jha, Dr. Ganga Nath	238, 324
Japan,	353
Julius Caesar	18

K

Kamala Lectures	205, 83
Kerr, Sir John	93
King Emperor	166
Khaira, Kumar Guroo Prasad of, Professorships	204, 220
Kramrisch, Dr. Stella	216
Keshav Chandra Sen	358, 374, 375, 378, 379

L

London Mathematical Association	33
Lytton, Lord	207, 100, 180, 214, 229, 239, 250, 431, 432, 450
Levi, Dr. Sylvain	239, 117, 168, 198, 293, 451, 453
Lovett, Mr. Pat	127, 461
'London of the East'	139
Law colleges	186
Lal Mohun Ghosh	309
Louis XIV	180, 321
Legislative Assembly	322
Lord Lytton, Viceroy of India	387
Lawless laws	256

M

Mookerjea, Ganga Prosad--Asutosh's father	21 ff
Mitter, Justice Dwarka Nath	27, 161
Mookerjee's Theorems	33
Mookerjee, Hemanta Kumar, Asutosh's brother.	34
Mookerjee, Radhika Prosad, Asutosh's uncle,	43
Macann, Dr. Hugh	46
Mackenzie Act,	58
Mitra, Dr. Rajendra Lal,	68, 135, 391, 413
Miller, Hon'ble Sir Dawson,	71, 124, 141, 418, 433
Mookerjea, Dr. Radhakumud,	88, 92, 104, 282, 305, 422
Moustached Minerva	103



Mohabodhi Society	118
Modern Review	125
Mainardi	129
Monge's Differential Equation to all conics	130, 132
Musalmanpara Bomb Case	146
Maine, Mr.	152
Minto, Lord	171, 226
Macaulay, Lord	172
Mullick, S. N.	209
Macdonnel, Prof.	216
Modern Co-operative Agricultural Association	280
Mazzini	272
Mazumdar, Protap Ch.	375, 379, 379
Malaviya, Pandit Modan Mohun,	460
Mukherjea, Justice Manmotha Nath	468
Mutiny, The	386
Michael Modusudan	385
Mukhopadhaya Bhudev	385
Michael Angelo	18
Minto, First Lord	171

N

Nair, Sir Sankaran, Minutes of Dissent	181, 231, 399
Nalanda	11, 183, 235
Nirmalendu Ghosh Lectures	205
Non-Co-operation Movement	68, 206, 262, 263ff. 291 459
Native States	288
Nehru, Pandit Motilal	322
Nobin Chandra	330, 335
National Congress	392, 333, 464, 465
National Council of Education,	464
Naidu, Mrs. (Sorojini)	408
Napoleon	18, 260

O

O'kinaley, Mr. Justice	52, 54
Oldenburg, Hermann	477



P

Plato	441
Peter, the Great	373
Paldhi, Panchanon	31
Presidency College	36ff
Patna	73, 74
Pal, Mr. Bipin Chandra	94, 95 375, 378 406
Pedlar, Mr. (Sir Alexander)	128
Paranjpye, Dr. R. P.	131, 412
Page, Mr. Justice	148 151
Professorships in the University	187
Palit, Sir Tarak Nath	193, 194,
Petavel, Captan and Self-Government and Bread Problem	228, 280
Protestantism	373
Popes	373
Post-Graduate Consolidation Committee	202, 208
Post-Graduate Teaching, Councils of	202, 203, 206
Do. Departments	283, 291
Partition of Bengal	341

Q

Queen Empress	65
---------------	----

R

Raleigh, Hon. Mr.	59 174, 230
Ronaldshay, Lord	59, 68, 77, 234, 235, 206, 301, 431, 432
Roy, Sj Sris Chandra	102, 103, 107
Radhakrishnan, Prof.	106, 169, 287, 366, 450, 480
Raman, Dr. C. V.	235, 240, 301, 192, 100, 106, 134, 136
Rankin, Sir George	110
Roosevelt, President	122
Roy, Dr. Sir P. C.	131. 168 209, 451, 453
Ranade,	135, 430, 353
Ramanujam	135
Roy, Raja Ram Mohun	172, 369, 307, 371ff, 416
Ripon, Lord	173, 387



Regulations under the Universities Act	176, 177, 183, 296
Ramtanu Lahiri Fellowship	188
Readers, University	190
Report of Royal Commission on the Universities of Oxford & Cambridge	210
Railway Budget	258
Reynolds, Mr.	358
Ramkriahna Paramhansa	377
'Return Movement'	376, 377, 469

S

Scientific Education in Bengal	191ff
Sastri, Sivnath	30
Sanskrit College	50
Sarbadhicari, Dr. Sir Devaprasad	67
Sircar, Dr. Sir Nilratan	67
Saderson, Sir Lancelot	450, 67, 159
Sen, Hemendra Nath	87, 88, 91
Saraswati	118
Shamasastri, Dr. R.	125
Sylvester, Prof.	132, 136
Sankaritola Post Office Murder Case	147ff
Stephens, Mr. Justice	152, 153
Sen, Dr. Naresk Chandra	164
Sircar, Dr. Mohendra Lall	191, 192, 391 ff.
Smith, Mr. Vincent	222
Seal, Dr. Sir Brojendra Nath	248, 312, 366
Sircar, Piyari Charan	402
Sadler, Sir Michael	168, 414, 422, 450
Social Revolution	243

T

Taraporewalla, Dr. I. S. J.	105, 114, 136
Tilak, Lokamannya	332, 354, 123, 135, 332, 407, 416
Tagore, Professorship	57, 186
Telang, Mr. Justice	330, 447, 448
Tzardom	373
Tagore, Dr. Rabindra Nath	1, 407, 409, 434
Trivedi, Principal	483



U

Universities, Commission	59, 174, 175
University of Calcutta	64, ff. 136ff.
University of London	174
Depts. of Study and Researches	219ff.
University Law College	186, 187
University College of Science	193, 191, 194 etc.
University Reform	288, 209ff.
Do. Dacca	258

V

Vidyasagar, Iswar Chandra	29, 30, 89, 123, 330, 381, 582ff. 402
Vicramsila	183
Vinogradoff, Dr. Sir Paul	198, 477
Vivekananda	377, 378, 379
Varendra Research Society	464

W

Wood, Sir Charles	172
-------------------	-----

X

Xaviers, St. College	192
----------------------	-----

Y

Youth Movement	248
Youth awakening	249



ERRATA

Page	Line	For	Read
55	28	mather	mother
57	21	frank	front
75	Footnote	and he received	he received
82	20	depried	deprived
83	27	phenominal	phenomenal
84	23	just	jest
87	13	coga	choga
87	2	as	us
95	16	after the words	'can not' put 'be'
96	3	madding	maddening
103	20	शक्रसंहिता	शक्रसंहिता
117	26	Kaylay	Cayley
143	4	unwitten	unwritten
143	28	is	it
148	30	relavent	relevent
149	30	asprise	apprise
150	6	deciplinary	disciplinary
154	15	petiont	petition
151	22, 27	rub	rob
153	5	disclosses	discloses
154	26	ordians	ordains
171	20	omit	'their'
176	14	ther	their
176	14	famework	framework
198	23	Lylvain	Sylvain
200	27	unwary	unweary
201	3	emitate	imitate
201	3	emultate	emulate
216	2	tlreless	tireless

ERRATA

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<i>Page</i>	<i>Line</i>	<i>For</i>	<i>Read</i>
229	7	impresion	impression
234	16	Sutesh	Asutoshs
235	Footnote	itself for	for itself
237	25, 26	stuff	staff
238	1, 5	stuff	staff
238	4	compained	complained
255	30	tmosphere	atmosphere
258	7	national	educational edifice
271	19	pehaps	perhaps
287	6	outter	outer
306	28	intigrety	integrity
307	19	enertia	inertia
310	10	appenage	appendage
313	24	deminesh	diminish
315	4	tatent	talent
317	23	prescence	prescience
346	30	tuvy	turoy
336	9	Burmises	Burmans
551	6	permeat	permeate
353	1	occupies	occupies
353	18	Ananda Mohun Ghosh	A. M. Bose
361	12	crilisism	criticism
369, 384	6, 18	enertia	inertia
369	21	very	every
374	17	enterpreting	interpreting
375	4	outwordly	outwardly
379	16	Stroved	strove
385	13	rejuvination	rejuvenation
388	21	stimulous	stimulus
399	17	high	highly
468	26	multivarious	multifarious

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